

MUSIC**SCO: COSÌ FAN TUTTE**

USHER HALL, EDINBURGH

★★★★

WHEN concert performances of opera are as vivid as this, who needs a staging? Robin Ticciati had chosen Mozart's comedy *Così fan tutte* to launch the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's new season, and having the orchestra on stage made clear the vital role that Mozart's dramatic, lyrical music serves in conveying the opera's story.

There might not have been costumes or sets, but the striking performances that Ticciati drew from the SCO players, using a nicely period-informed approach, more than made up for that. The woodwind glowed, with parping basslines from bassoons and flutes bubbling seductively, and the strings were gloriously silvery, all subtly

responsive to Ticciati's energetic direction.

The SCO has gathered a starry line-up of soloists. Christopher Maltman stood out as a perhaps rather young-looking Don Alfonso, gleefully egging the lads on.

Maximilian Schmitt and Adam Plachetka were effortlessly lyrical and often wide-eyed as the young Ferrando and Guglielmo, and although Rachel Frenkel was pure-toned as a butter-wouldn't-melt Dorabella, Sally Matthews's wide vibrato and soft-edged sound as Fiordiligi seemed rather at odds with the crisp precision of the playing and singing elsewhere. Laura Tatulescu threatened to steal the show, though, as the mischievous maid Despina, taking an evident delight in her mistresses' predicament.

DAVID KETTLE