

**MUSIC**  
**SCOTTISH ENSEMBLE:**  
**ILLUMINATIONS**

QUEEN'S HALL, EDINBURGH

★★★★

It was only the first concert in the Scottish Ensemble's new season, but already they were introducing two innovations. First up, a new musical *Postcard* by Glasgow-based composer Martin Suckling; director Jonathan Morton explained that rather than commissioning a single long piece from Suckling, the group would be playing a short offering by him in each of their concerts this season. And despite its brevity, it still packed a punch, combining ear-tweaking micro-tonality with intense lyricism.

The evening's big innovation, though, was a performance of *Les illuminations*, Britten's settings of poetry by Rimbaud, with specially commissioned visuals by video artist Netia Jones. There was something

about the combination of Jones's glistening imagery, Britten's vivid music and Rimbaud's strange, proto-surrealist poetry that really worked. There was a practical purpose to the visuals – Jones used them to supply English translations of the Rimbaud texts – but her ghostly figures and sinister fairground carousels seemed entirely in-keeping with the song cycle's decadent beauty. The intense, sharply-defined playing from the Scottish Ensemble musicians only added to the spine-tingling vision of the work.

Elsewhere, the concert didn't add up to much more than the sum of its parts, but it was no less compelling for that. The Mozart *Divertimento K136* had bite yet also sweetness, and Morton's string-orchestra arrangement of the Schumann Third String Quartet showed an expert control of texture, and earned a supple, eloquent performance from the group.

**DAVID KETTLE**