

CLASSICAL

Alba New Music Festival

St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh



While Nicola Benedetti was packing out the Usher Hall, across town a brand new Edinburgh festival was quietly being born. Alba New Music is a recently founded charity committed to championing contemporary sounds, and their two-day inaugural festival filled St Giles' Cathedral with some of the most complex works of recent years, in a canny programme focused around three remarkable solo performers. Uncompromising, sometimes maddening, frequently impenetrable, it also provided some breathtakingly virtuosic performances of bristlingly individual music that rarely gets an airing north of the border.

The eloquent intricacies of Wieland Hoban's magical Knockler, the opener in guitarist Diego Castro Magas's striking opening recital, got rather lost in the Cathedral's resonant acoustic, but that was more than made up for by his masterful playing and effects-

pedalling in Richard Barrett's Transmission, whose surround-sound electronics engulfed the audience with joyfully cacophonous layers of noise. The following afternoon, James Dillon's febrile Sgothan sent flurries of notes ricocheting around St Giles' walls in flautist Richard Craig's theatrical concert, which ended with one of the "new complexity" movement's cornerstones, Brian Fernyhough's Unity Capsule, in an account more like a dramatic soliloquy than a musical performance. That evening, in her exquisite recital soprano Peyee Chen included two witty, self-interrupting Récitations by Georges Aperghis, as well as the fractured folk of Jennifer Walshe's ukelele-accompanied "Three Songs" by Ukeoirn O'Connor.

There are ways Alba New Music can refine their offering for a broader audience – less abstruse programme notes would make this forbidding music more friendly, for example. But it was a rich, rewarding

weekend, unapologetically challenging, but pulled off with panache.

DAVID KETTLE

MUSIC

Eastern Promise

Platform, Easterhouse



Any night that concludes with Alexis Taylor taking requests for stripped down versions of Hot Chip tunes can't be a bad one can it? The choirboy-sweet voiced frontman of the London dance-pop heroes' set of sombre solo songs for piano was a delicate highlight of the second night of a weekend of fine music in Easterhouse – and there's a phrase you don't read all that often.

Organised annually by arts centre Platform's music programmer Alun Woodward, formerly of The Delgados and a founder of independent record label Chemical Underground, Eastern Promise exists to not only bring together eye-catching combinations of leftfield artists, but to bring them to one of Glasgow's much less than fashionable suburbs (there's a bus