

on-screen declamatory closure.

The bar had already been set high by an opening performance on small pipes by Brighde Chaimbeul, a 2016 BBC Young Folk Award-winner, intuitively accompanied by guitarist Innes White. When she joined Ainslie and guitarist Byrnes for a closing set, the twin small pipes united in an energetic Bulgarian stomp over thrumming bouzouki, as well as a plangently harmonised slow air that boded well indeed for the album the two pipers are planning.

**JIM GILCHRIST**

## **MUSIC**

### **Joshua Bell and ASMF**

Usher Hall



A packed, expectant house greeted starry US violinist Joshua Bell and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields for their Sunday afternoon stop-off at the Usher Hall. And in response, they put on a beautifully crafted, energetic show.

Bell has achieved something quite special since becoming the ensemble's music director in 2011. Still there were its renowned polish and finesse, its

assured, aristocratic smoothness. But under Bell they have a remarkable focus, too, and there's an etched clarity to their playing: every gesture has direction and meaning. And it's a joy to watch an ensemble in which every musician seems so engaged.

That sense of focus and meaning was there in an eager, propulsive Beethoven Second Symphony, which Bell directed with sweeping but eloquent gestures from the leader's chair – its first movement, in particular, was crisply detailed but never pernicky.

Beforehand, US composer Edgar Meyer's recent Overture for violin and orchestra was rather a polite, softly spoken offering, intricate in its rhythmic interplay but seldom demonstrative about its witty complexities. Written specially for Bell, it drew on the violinist's agility and lyrical tone to great effect, but if it might take a few more listens for the piece to lodge in the memory.

Bell's opener was a fresh, vibrant Four Seasons, at once fastidiously considered and joyfully supple. The Academy players attacked Vivaldi's pictorial evocations with relish – especially delightful were John Constable's tasteful harpsichord contributions – a confident, self-assured account from a fruitful partnership.

**DAVID KETTLE**