

MUSIC

Benjamin Appl & Pavel Kolesnikov

Queen's Hall



It's a risky game that German singer Benjamin Appl is playing. Make no mistake: he has a beautiful, light baritone that's capable of enormous sensitivity and expression, and he's immaculate in his diction and careful in his characterisation, too. But he's often frustratingly withdrawn, as though inviting the audience into an intimate experience of quiet reflection, apparently reluctant to broaden out and actively engage his listeners.

He was more extrovert, it's true, in the songs by Schumann and Grieg that formed the second half of what was a nonetheless captivating Queen's Hall recital. But in his opening Schubert selection, he seemed far more at home in the aching, love-lorn introspection of *Evening Star* or *Nocture* than in the gruesome mini-drama *The Dwarf*, for example, where he was too quick to sink back into sensitive introspection following more dramatic episodes. Most frustrating, however, was his rather apologetic account of Matthias Pintscher's *Canto I*, which needed a performance of far greater conviction to make it truly convincing.

Pianist Pavel Kolesnikov was a wonderfully able, assertive partner, however, thoroughly alive to the various songs' shifting moods – and eager to convey them to his listeners. It felt too often as though, despite his vocal glories, Appl would have been happier singing to himself.

DAVID KETTLE