

Reviews

MUSIC

Bruckner Orchestra Linz & Markus Poschner

Usher Hall, Edinburgh

★★★★

With a piece as epic and emotionally overwhelming as Mahler's Second Symphony, everyone has their own expectations as to how it should go. That was clear from the huge audience for the Bruckner Orchestra Linz's performance – and with a visiting orchestra immersed in Austrian culture, expectations were high.

And indeed, there were a lot of extremely good things about conductor Markus Poschner's performance of the massive work. His two soloists – soprano Brigitte Geller and mezzo Theresa Kronthaler – were fine, focused and ravishingly sculpted in their unfolding lines, and his huge choir, from the Leeds and Sheffield Philharmonic Choruses, was on strong form too. His orchestra played with grit and vigour, attacking Mahler's turbulent opening with determination, and building up momentum at the brisk speeds Poschner adopted. His ingratiating slow movement, too, was deli-

ciously flecked with cheeky portamento. And yet there were strange, unconvincing aspects to the performance. Poschner's orchestral musicians were gloriously soloistic, to the point of occasional disagreements over ensemble between sections. And while the conductor was effective at conjuring Mahler's shifting moods, the result sometimes felt like a patchwork of sharply defined but separate episodes.

Overall, it felt a little too polite to fully convey Mahler's screaming desperation or ecstatic visions of the beyond. The crashing gongs and chiming bells of Poschner's transcendent conclusion were certainly stirring, but it was missing the raw intensity that can make the piece such a life-changing experience.*

DAVID KETTLE

MUSIC

Tradfest: Brighde Chaimbeul with Aidan O'Rourke

Scottish Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh

★★★★

Small pipes and fiddle might have been made for each oth-