

Reviews

MUSIC

Dunedin Consort/John Butt & Cryptic, Fantasy and Madness

Assembly Roxy



Fantasy and Madness went the show's colourful title. And it was to be a meeting of two of Scotland's creative powerhouses – John Butt's crack early music group the Dunedin Consort, and Glasgow theatre makers Cryptic. What they were tackling was fantastical enough – Restoration reworkings of Shakespeare and Cervantes, turned into operas and masques with music by the likes of Locke and Purcell.

There's a big question of how to present the musical gems embedded within these several-hour concoctions of drama, dance, music and more to a modern-day audience. But there was little fantasy or madness in Cryptic associate director Josh Armstrong's tame staging, whose monochrome cut-outs of tridents and asses' heads drained colour from the show, and which – perhaps advisedly – made little attempt at coherent storytelling.

There was far more of both in the Dunedins' gloriously dramatic, assertive playing, led with immaculate precision from the harpsichord by Butt. Singers Mhairi Lawson and Matthew Brook – both ruddy-cheeked and grinning suggestively – gave brilliantly vivid performances, full of vocal theatrics, savouring every word for its dramatic potential. Lawson's tearjerking *Plaint* from Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* was as heart-breaking as it was exquisite.

It was an ambitious and admirable exercise, but in the end the show's theatricality seemed to come almost entirely from the music itself, and the musicians' colourful accounts. Perhaps the question of how to successfully stage these bleeding chunks has yet to be resolved.

DAVID KETTLE

MUSIC

Justin Currie & the RSNO

Paisley Abbey



The Paisley Abbey concert featuring the RSNO in collaboration with, as conduc-