



CLASSICAL

George Li

The Queen's Hall



It's tempting simply to sit back and marvel in open-mouthed amazement at the truly remarkable technical prowess of young Boston-born pianist George Li, who

made his International Festival debut following competition wins and high-profile bookings the other side of the Atlantic. And there's plenty to be amazed by, not least his glittering, galvanising, finger-breaking virtuosity, most clearly on show in the fiery Carmen transcription that formed his second, begged-for encore.

He clearly has an intense

personal identification with the music he's playing, even seeming to conduct certain passages with his left hand, or react in surprise at unexpected harmonic twists.

But maybe that's the problem, because there were some peculiarly idiosyncratic aspects to his recital – chords hammered so forcefully that pitch was obscured; curiously stop-start rhythms; and

brittle chimings in his high right-hand melodies. Rather than acting as a conduit for the composers' thoughts, it was as if they were the vessels for Li's huge musical personality.

And following a rather overwrought Haydn sonata, the repertoire he'd chosen moved steadily closer to his fiery, extrovert style, from a Chopin Second Sonata that

was alternately supple and brutal, with a gratifyingly no-nonsense Funeral March movement, through Rachmaninov's Corelli Variations rather exaggerated in their contrasts, to two effervescent Liszt showpieces – an enthralling and thoroughly entertaining conclusion to what had been a puzzling recital.

DAVID KETTLE