

Lammermuir Festival Opening Weekend

Various venues

Cathedrals of sound – that's the cliché routinely wheeled out to describe Bruckner's monumental symphonies. But cliché or not, it felt like the ideal description for the Lammermuir Festival's opening concert (☆☆☆☆), whose climax was a magnificent Bruckner Seventh that filled every nook in the warm interior of St Mary's Church, Haddington.

Indeed, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra players themselves spread back far beyond the nave and chancel, with six or seven rows of woodwind and brass, but they thereby delivered a wonderfully three-dimensional richness to the sound. Conductor Karl-Heinz Steffens took things at a leisurely pace – perhaps unnecessarily so, with St Mary's admittedly resonant yet beautifully clear, crisply detailed acoustic – and stressed the architectural grandeur of the Symphony. His brassy climaxes (complete with quartet of Wagner



← John Butt and the Dunedin Consort

tubas) were almost overwhelming – but, more importantly, felt like the inevitable outcome of the slowly evolving material that had gone before. His dense, heavy scherzo, however, felt slightly too tightly controlled and soft-edged to whip up the demonic energy the movement can often generate.

Nevertheless, it was a magisterial performance, full of sonic splendour, with the BBC SSO players on exceptional form. They were utterly convincing, too, before the interval as a far more intimate ensemble for Haydn's C major Cello Concerto, with 2012 BBC Young Musician winner Laura van der Heijden as soloist. She gave a sprightly, impeccably phrased

account, as muscular as it was lyrical – even if her sometimes rather liberal tempo fluctuations threatened to drag back Steffens's brisk pace at times.

"I know what you're thinking: what does that sound like backwards?" A change of tone completely on Saturday afternoon, for harpsichordist and scholar John Butt's masterful journey through Bach's Musical Offering in Gladsmuir's Victorian Parish Church, for which he was joined by seven players from his Dunedin Consort (☆☆☆☆). It was a wonderfully witty yet erudite event, matching brilliantly characterful playing – of the intricate canons and inventions Bach conjured from an awkward theme throw at him by Frederick the Great – with pointed insights from Butt himself.

And it was just the kind of format to bring what Butt described as this 'arcane mind-music' dazzlingly alive, as he came up with ever more ingenious ways to demonstrate how Bach went far beyond the King's initial challenge. How about coming up with alternative possibilities for Bach's unrealised, DIY closing canons? Or getting listeners to raise their hands when they'd had enough of a 'perpetual' canon, which could theoretically go on forever? Butt's talk-plus-performance concept was just as playful and insightful as Bach's music – enormous but entirely serious fun for both mind and heart.

More music for the heart to close Saturday, with a deeply expressive all-Schubert concert from brothers Magnus and Guy Johnston on violin and cello, and pianist Tom Poster (★★★★) in the intimate, capacity-filled space of Dirleton Kirk. There might have been a few unwelcome intonation lapses and misjudged articulations in Guy J's hearty, rubato-heavy Arpeggione Sonata, but the threesome's B flat Piano Trio was full of heroic energy, and

their opening Notturmo exquisitely refined – a performance to truly treasure.

DAVID KETTLE

MUSIC

Jonny Mansfield's Elftet

Jazz Bar, Edinburgh



Any uninformed who may have presumed an elftet to be an ensemble of delicate sprites would have been instantly disabused by the formidable opening blast from the 11 musicians crammed precariously on the Jazz Bar's stage. With brass fanfaring giving way to fiery electric guitar work and an elephantine bass clarinet stomp, Silhouette introduced this young band's bewilderingly varied tone palette, led by award-winning vibraphonist Johnny Mansfield and pitching a muscular brass and reeds quartet alongside cello and violin, guitar, electric bass, drums, plus singer-flautist Ella Hohnen-Ford..

Ford's vocals were some-