

page, rekindling the revolutionary spirit of Beethoven. A mesmerising tour-de-force.

Such soul-seeking integrity also informed Harding's probing vision of Mahler's trenchant Ninth Symphony. Harding has a knack with this orchestra of eliciting crystal-line detail, amplified through power-driven intensity. So when the final aching Adagio arrived – a subliminal accepting “hymn” that fades to breathtaking silence (despite the whistling Usher Hall air conditioning) – this journey, celebrating all of life's beauty, angst and grotesqueness, found its magical, inevitable resolution.

**KEN WALTON**

## **CLASSICAL**

### **Patricia Petibon & Susan Manoff**

Queen's Hall

★★★★★

You might be wary of sitting in the front row with a Fringe stand-up, for fear of ending up part of the show. At a genteel Queen's Hall morning recital, you'd think you'd be safe. Not so with French soprano Patricia Petibon, who dragged one reluctant suspect up on stage for a bit of

a dance, and showered others with cuddly chickens and plastic pork chops.

This was a song recital like no other – exuberant, wildly theatrical and also slightly deranged, just like the early 20th-century French chansons Petibon brought together for what she rightly titled *La Belle Excentrique*.

Alongside simmering, sophisticated ditties from Poulenc, Satie and others, she yelped her way through dog noises in Rosenthal's *Fido*, *Fido*, and gazed in amazement as pianist Susan Manoff strapped her nose into a curling trunk for the same composer's *L'éléphant du Jardin des Plantes*.

But behind the absurd, surreal antics – and there were plenty of them – lay impeccable, commanding performances from the two women. Petibon's meltingly beautiful soprano inhabited each song as though it were a miniature opera, and Manoff was a perceptive, brilliantly characterful partner at the piano. It was an astutely varied recital that brought us up short with profound tragedy alongside the high jinks, and it was as provocative as it was entertaining. A magnificent achievement.

**DAVID KETTLE**