

## MUSIC

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### **RSNO/John Mauceri, Alan Cumming (narrator)**

Usher Hall, Edinburgh

★★★★

It was *The Nutcracker*, all right, but not as anybody knew it. Except conductor John Mauceri, whose brainchild *The Nutcracker* and the Mouse King was, and who conducted the world premiere performance with the RSNO and one Alan Cumming as narrator.

Figuring that the storyline of Tchaikovsky's well-loved seasonal ballet forms only one small part of ETA Hoffmann's original epic tale, Mauceri has raided other Tchaikovsky works for snippets and movements to accompany the rest of the story, narrated against a constantly changing orchestral backdrop. The result is surprising, illuminating – and long. My, it is long. Billed as 65 minutes, it ran to almost 90, and needs some merciless cutting to bring it under control. But the potential's there for Mauceri's creation to fly as a Christmas family treat, especially when given as captivating a performance as it was by Cumming and the RSNO, both on excellent form.

Cumming played things relatively straight, but clearly relished the melodramatic, flamboyant fairytale storytelling, and dovetailed immaculately with Mauceri's musical direction. If at times things got sickly sweet, at others Cumming injected a salty tang of the grotesque, clearly revelling in the tale's more macabre corners.

Stranger, though, was Mauceri's rather four-square, unyielding direction in some of the lengthier instrumental music, and also in the excerpts from *The Snow Maiden* and *The Sleeping Beauty* as if in a rush to move things forward rather than wallowing in the moment. His three movements from Prokofiev's *Cinderella* made for a refreshingly sharp-edged counterpoint, carried off with vigour.

**DAVID KETTLE**

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### **BBC SSO: Holliger at 80**

City Halls, Glasgow

★★★★

Of the three works included in this 80th birthday