

## **RSNO/Søndergard**

Usher Hall, Edinburgh



Not so much a concert, more a statement of intent – even a manifesto. For his inaugural concert as RSNO music director, Thomas Søndergård had taken inspiration from Mahler's famous quote about a symphony needing to be like the world, to contain everything – as he explained in his chatty introduction. It was a demanding but invigorating evening, and it felt like Søndergård was showing us his own musical world, filled with his particular passions.

So there was contemporary music, with Finnish composer Lotta Wennäkoski's madcap scherzo *Flounce* as opener, driven hard by Søndergård and with the RSNO musicians displaying breathtaking switchback virtuosity. Next came Classical precision, with a slimmed-down band backing Francesco Piemontesi in a fastidious Beethoven

Second Piano Concerto, lovingly shaped and caressed into being, but not really finding its bite until the heavily accented finale.

And, of course, Mahler's Fifth to finish – the first instalment in Søndergård's projected four-year Mahler symphony cycle with the orchestra. Its opening funeral march felt strangely well-behaved and snarl-free, but Søndergård soon let rip with a tumultuous, hair-raising second movement and thoroughly unsettling scherzo – making the finale's grand perorations sound all the more earnt. Its famous Adagietto was a study in restraint and spontaneity.

Details sparkled with meaning throughout, as though each of the RSNO musicians wanted to contribute their voice to Søndergård's overarching drama. And the players were on exceptional form – energised by a new sense of direction, a renewed feeling of purpose. Søndergård set the bar high, and we clearly have plenty to anticipate from him.

**DAVID KETTLE**