

Reviews

MUSIC

Russian State Symphony Orchestra/Valentin Uryupin

Usher Hall, Edinburgh

★★★★

You'd probably expect a big Russian orchestra to be able to play Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake suite in its sleep. No doubt the players of the Russian State Symphony Orchestra, who opened the Usher Hall's new Sunday Classics season, know the well-worn warhorse inside out, but there was no sense of over-familiarity (or slumber) in their gleaming performance under young Russian conductor Valentin Uryupin. This was searching, provocative stuff, hot-headed and impulsive in its climaxes, tremulous and remarkably fluid in its quiet introspection, urged on by Uryupin's unconventional gestures – sometimes a bit jerky, but unfailingly effective.

Their closing Rachmaninov Second Symphony cast the conductor and orchestra's clearly intense relationship on a grander scale. And while there could perhaps have been a little more snarling violence to the rather well-behaved scherzo, it was a grand, sweeping account nonethe-

less, one that showcased the ensemble's velvety strings and piquant wind and brass. Its slow movement was tender in its restraint, its finale delivered as great swelling waves of music crashing over the enthusiastic audience.

In between came a very grown-up Shostakovich Second Piano Concerto from Irish pianist Barry Douglas. It might have been written for his pianist son's graduation concert, but for Douglas and Uryupin, the Concerto's youthful playfulness hid something far darker. From the snappy, spiky, heavily accented opening, there was a wonderfully menacing, manic edge to their account – put aside somewhat in their caressing slow movement, but returning in the biting, chilly clarity of the finale. Though Douglas's eagerness to push forward threatened ensemble at times, it was a brilliant, perceptive reading.

DAVID KETTLE

THEATRE

Gagarin Way

Dundee Rep

★★★★

WE ARE all, I suppose, sadder and wiser than we were in 2001,