

SCO & Benjamin Beilman

Queen's Hall, Edinburgh

★★★★

THERE were high expectations for the young US violin wunderkind Benjamin Beilman, one of the classical world's most rapidly rising stars, making his debut with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. And what he delivered was a simply breathtaking account of Barber's Violin Concerto.

Technically he seemed to revel in his own immaculate, strongly projected playing, with articulation so sharply etched it was uncanny, especially in the fiendish figurations of the Concerto's fiery finale.

But it was the sophistication of his insights into Barber's Concerto that impressed the most: he dug deep into the troubled first movement, for example, to convey unflinchingly its turbulent drama and melancholy.

His vibrato was exceptionally wide and pronounced, especially in a slow movement of otherwise noble restraint, but that was in keeping with the Concerto's golden age origins – and entirely absent from the lightly tripping, period-flavoured Bach Gavotte that he played as a forcefully demanded encore.

He's a remarkable talent, delivering playing of rare insight and generosity, as

big professional theatres this Christmas.

There's the traditional Cinderella at the King's or, down at the Playhouse, there's this delicious touring version of the story of Shrek, first seen on screen in 2001, in one of the best-loved animated movies of the century so far.

Shrek, as all his fans know, is a grumpy green ogre with a Scottish accent who lives in a swamp and generally prefers his own company. He's therefore not your typical fairy-tale prince; and when he sets off with his best friend, a camp talking donkey, to collect a bride for the nasty, short and bossy Lord Farquaad, he soon

captivating as it is gloriously entertaining.

Just as entertaining was the concert's opener, John Adams's witty Son of Chamber Symphony, given a sparkling, punchy account by a slimmed-down SCO under young US conductor Karina Canellakis, who threw herself into the conducting with gutsy, determined gestures.

Things went a bit off the boil in a rather tame Schubert Fifth Symphony after the interval – not helped by the SCO winds being placed directly in front of the conductor, strings behind them, creating a few awkward balance issues. Nevertheless, it was a revelatory evening.

DAVID KETTLE