

mental repetitions, its amplified insistence reverberating like an unstoppable life force, from which the strings drew inspiration.

It's a piece that ensnares you, much in the obsessive way raw-edged minimalism does. But there is an abundance of originality and alluring charm that this bare-knuckle performance hungrily embraced.

Maxwell Davies' *The Last Island* followed, a mercurial, sometime feverish string sextet, to which Williams' fitful Orkney footage added moody visual reference. To some extent, though, it robbed our minds of the freedom to interpret the shard-like musical soundscapes.

David Horne's unnerving arrangement of Max's *Farewell to Stromness* was a beguiling take on a popular tune. Then to finish, Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*, in a gloriously flowing and effusive performance that soaked up the searching purple glow of the evening's lighting scheme.

**KEN WALTON**

## **MUSIC**

### **The Scottish Chamber**

## **Orchestra and Richard Egarr**

Queen's Hall, Edinburgh

☆☆☆☆

Seldom can Beethoven's grass have felt so green, his stream so sparkling, his thunderclaps so visceral, his frolicking peasants so carefree. It wasn't that conductor Richard Egarr was particularly trying to play up the picturesqueness in his remarkable *Pastoral* Symphony with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra – more that his vivid scene-painting simply emerged as if from under layers of dust in his superbly fresh, vivid, driven account.

Egarr's finale might have been a little too brisk to truly summon a sense of spiritual wonder at nature's creations, but it was as if his awe-struck shepherd couldn't contain his eagerness to thank the Almighty after Egarr's raging, volatile storm. And the SCO players lapped up Egarr's enthusiastic, energetic, demandingly precise direction – there was a true sense of partnership, only confirmed by Egarr insisting the whole band bowed at the end.

Beforehand, though, came something of an oddity – as

Egarr warned us in his amusing introduction – in the form of the *First Symphony* by French early Romantic Étienne Méhul, almost exactly contemporary with Beethoven's *Pastoral*, but an entirely different piece in its froth, wit and unpredictable but unstoppable repetitions. It was a bit of a historical curiosity, but fascinating nonetheless – especially in its striking, pre-Berlioz orchestration – and Egarr and the SCO bristled with conviction in their high-octane account.

For the concert opener, Beethoven's *Prometheus Overture*, Egarr had bounded onto the stage, commanding its arresting opening chords even before the audience's applause had died down. It set the tone perfectly for his electrifying, provocative concert.

**DAVID KETTLE**

## **MUSIC**

### **Christine and the Queens**

O2 Academy, Glasgow

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Christine and the Queens is a relatively new love affair for music fans throughout the UK but it transpires that the woman behind the stage