

SCO & Pekka Kuusisto

Queen's Hall, Edinburgh



YOU can almost guarantee you won't get an everyday, run-of-the-mill classical concert (whatever that is) when Pekka Kuusisto's on stage. Instead, the ace Finnish violinist – and, a recent addition to his craft, conductor – teases, prods and provokes, butting contrasting composers and styles, even ensembles, up against each other in events that are free-flowing, playful and gently challenging.

Which was exactly the case with his dazzling concert with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the first of three this season as a featured artist. First he mixed Bach and contemporary Swedish composer Anders Hillborg, a marshmallow account of the former's Third Brandenburg Concerto with a select group of nine SCO strings, playing as though entirely for their own pleasure and friendship, followed by the madcap but very moving Bach *Materia* by the latter. Hillborg's creation was full of crazy switches between styles, whistling and humming from Kuusisto as soloist, a Hendrix-inspired duet from Kuusisto and SCO principal bassist

has changed in the 125 years since Oscar Wilde's *A Woman Of No Importance* first opened in London, the fact that those changes have not gone far enough still give the play a stinging relevance to the times we live in.

At the centre of the drama stands a man called Lord Illingworth, a British establishment figure who is not exactly a politician, but who nonetheless wields social power, sta-

Nikita Naumov, all delivered with winning panache and suitable theatricality.

It was a more reflective Kuusisto who returned alone after the interval, however, to intermingle three dances from Bach's Third Partita with three Finnish folk tunes – beautifully unadorned, quiet, trippingly rhythmic and frankly hard to tell apart, which was surely the point.

He closed, however, with a conductor's baton in his hand and the SCO in front of him. And if his Sibelius Fifth Symphony was sometimes a little foursquare, it made up for that with abundant wonder and sincerity. It was a startling evening that drew a packed audience, and one that reaffirmed the shared joys of hearing and making music.

DAVID KETTLE