

**MUSIC****SCO, Andrew Manze, Sarah Fox**

Queen's Hall, Edinburgh

★★★★

"And now you're going to hear why it's not played very often." Conductor Andrew Manze had his tongue firmly in his cheek in his less than auspicious introduction to the SCO's concert opener, the brooding 1944 Passacaille by Swiss composer Frank Martin. But Manze needn't have worried: in his carefully judged performance, the piece was a thing of dark beauty, its dense harmonies and interweaving lines brought vividly alive by the SCO strings on radiant form.

It set the ideal tone, too, for a thoughtful concert that concluded with a beautifully judged Vaughan Williams Fifth Symphony, for which Manze had arranged Purcell's pealing Bell Anthem Prelude as an appropriately meditative lead-in. There was plenty of the contemplative in Manze's account of the Symphony, often viewed as a soothing balm for the nation during the trauma of the Second World War, but he pointed up the work's own gentle conflicts, too – not least in an unsettling scherzo that bordered on the gleefully grotesque, full of impeccably articulated textures and extraordinary detail.

The SCO strings were just as gloriously detailed (and – sometimes – grotesque) in a vivid account of Britten's Rimbaud song cycle *Les illuminations* – conjuring expansive landscapes in a visionary *Being Beateous*. It was a shame that soprano Sarah Fox didn't let herself go a bit more:

★★★★

CELTIC Connections triumphantly celebrated its 25th anniversary on Thursday night with an opening concert which crammed in as many acts as it could without actually locking us in the concert hall until the following day. It opened in stirring form with a solo piper from the Tryst pipe band sounding a lament on a darkened stage before giving way to the syncopated snarl of a drum salute, and closed (bar the obligatory encore jambo-ree) with those same pipers and drummers joining Ross Ainslie and Ali Hutton in a resounding set.

In between came a bewildering succession of performers, many of whom had played Connections numerous times, not least pianist Dave Milligan, the show's director, and drummer James Mackintosh, both of whom played in the first festival and here

she warmed up towards the end of the piece, and her gorgeous, focused tone was never in doubt, but her performance felt nowhere near flamboyant or theatrical enough for Britten's exuberant musical responses to the French poet's unhinged imagery.

**DAVID KETTLE****THEATRE****Flashdance**

Playhouse, Edinburgh

★★★★

IT'S a genre in itself, the 1980s movie-turned-musical about dance as a symbol of freedom and self-realisation; and *Flashdance* is perhaps the