

CLASSICAL

Scottish Chamber Orchestra/Olari Elts, Maxim Rysanov (viola)

Queen's Hall, Edinburgh



Themes and ideas, interconnections and contrasts, ricocheted across Estonian conductor Olari Elts's cleverly constructed concert with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

There was birdsong—the real thing, recorded and pumped out through speakers, in Finnish composer Rautavaara's

“concerto for birds and orchestra” Cantus Arcticus; and birdsong as reimagined by Baroque composers, then reimagined again by Ottorino Respighi in his witty suite The Birds. Elts’s Rautavaara was a slow-burn, vivid with carefully etched detail and drawing intensely on the SCO players’ soloistic skills – not least flautists Alison Mitchell and Brontë Hudnott, warbling gently at the start of the first movement before building to an overwhelmingly sonorous climax as a chorus of migrating whooper swans call to

each other. Elts’s Respighi was no less vivid, with an exquisite sparkle to its impeccably balanced textures – refined, but with a mischievous glint in its eye all the same.

And there were landscapes: the wide open, unknown lands of the settlers in Aaron Copland’s Appalachian Spring and the dark, tempestuous landscape of the soul in the recent Viola Concerto by Latvian composer Peteris Vasks.

Ukrainian-born violist Maxim Rysanov was the fiercely committed soloist in the concerto, giving a performance

of fearsome focus and intensity from untold sorrow through fury to – well, perhaps resignation, perhaps transcendence. He’s a breathtakingly perceptive, charismatic player, taking the audience with him on every note of his turbulent journey. Elts’s Copland, too, felt intimate and introspective rather than monumental and expansive, offering a very fresh, human perspective on this well-loved classic of Americana.

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