

Scottish Chamber Orchestra/Josep Pons, Bertrand Chamayou (piano)

Queen's Hall, Edinburgh

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Few, if any, in the audience can have been familiar with the SCO's opener, Ginastera's *Variaciones concertantes*. It's clearly a work that visiting conductor Josep Pons feels passionately about, to judge by his eager, detailed direction, leaning in over the players to draw out responses. And it proved a brilliant showcase for the SCO musicians' talents, too, each of its 12 sections putting different instruments in the spotlight, from spiky clarinet to breath-takingly agile violin.

If the piece feels a little unbalanced – its generally introspective mood hardly prepares the listener for the rip-roaring abandon of its furiously rhythmic finale – it proved an ideal scene-setter for Ravel's equally eclectic Piano Concerto, the evening's main attraction, given a lithe, strongly projected account by the composer's compatriot Bertrand Chamayou. A little too strongly projected, perhaps, given the piano's position almost in the laps of those in the Queen's Hall's front row, though he delivered a beguiling perspective on the Concer-

in the Quaker Studio at the Pleasance, two childlike but ageless characters called Melody and Sam are in training. They seem to be chums or flatmates; but whatever its origin, their bantering, bruising relationship is focused on the idea of becoming record breakers, and getting their names in the big book of records.

So for absolute ages, Melody and Sam mess about in their flat first training for an attempt on the world record for eating beans with a cocktail stick, then – after Melody receives a mysterious letter from a world adventuring organisa-

to's heartbreaking slow movement, his right hand expressively free against the left hand's immovable accompaniment. It was a brisk, urgent reading all round, and with switchbank mood swings from both Chamayou and the Orchestra under Pons, it captured the work's slightly deranged energy wonderfully.

Pons's closing Beethoven Fourth Symphony had a similarly unhinged quality, as though it were music exploring extremes, though joyfully so – from the explosion of its first movement's fast section after a veiled slow introduction, to a stormy, hyperactive finale. It was all enormous fun, but hardly easy listening: this was a performance that demanded to be heard.

DAVID KETTLE