

Reviews

MUSIC

The SCO & Robert Levin

Usher Hall, Edinburgh

★★★★

It's always gratifying when a performer provides a fresh perspective on a well-known piece. With Beethoven's gruff Third Piano Concerto, however, it was as though pianist and scholar Robert Levin was out to challenge even our most basic assumptions about the work.

Playing along quietly in the normally orchestra-only exposition, adding in his own improvised lead-ins and interruptions, pedalling freely, stretching rhythms and inserting impromptu melodic embellishments, he treated what we normally hear as nothing more than the Concerto's bare bones, a framework for spontaneous, in-the-moment creation – all backed up by serious historical scholarship, of course.

The result was edge-of-your-seat stuff, sometimes raising a smile, often raising eyebrows, but carried through with utter conviction and brilliant, sometimes rather hard-edged clarity. Most captivating, though, was the breathtaking immediacy of Levin's account, and

its disarming honesty – maybe this'll work, maybe not, he seemed to say, but we'll do it anyway.

It sometimes left the Scottish Chamber Orchestra players – under young US conductor Case Scaglione, making his UK debut as a stand-in for an indisposed Emmanuel Krivine – hanging in mid-air, wondering when Levin was going to allow them back in. But they lapped up his spontaneity in playing that was urgent and beautifully responsive.

Scaglione was just as urgent in his opening to Beethoven's Fifth, which concluded the concert, and nonchalantly elegant in its slow movement, but his sense of propulsion had dissipated slightly by the surprisingly stately finale. His Weber *Der Freischütz* Overture made a purposeful, sprightly opener, however – helped along by the glorious sonorities of the SCO's four natural horns.

DAVID KETTLE

MUSIC

Marc Almond

Usher Hall, Edinburgh

★★★★

"HERE'S another one of my chart topping hits," declared