

major but the larghetto, a Siciliano, would have benefited from a slightly faster more dance-like quality.

SUSAN NICKALLS

MUSIC

Shanghai Symphony Orchestra

Usher Hall



It's hard not to be aware of the many levels of irony and self-awareness in a Chinese orchestra playing music by a Soviet composer that either conforms to or subverts (depending on how you look at it) the brutal strictures of a totalitarian state.

But that aside, Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony proved an ideal showpiece for the sonic brilliance of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. It's China's longest-established classical orchestra, and its history shows in the sweep and sheen of its strings, its piquant wind, its bright, blaz-

ing brass. But despite the symphony offering a canvas on which all those could shine, it felt like a strangely detached performance, one whose notes were dispatched dazzlingly, but one whose story was perhaps struggling to be heard. Conductor Long Yu was in his element in the symphony's ferocious, loud music – its coruscating conclusion almost threw the roof off the Usher Hall – but his slower music seemed rather flat in comparison, and somewhat lacking the depths of angst and despair Shostakovich surely intended.

Beforehand, Alisa Weilerstein gave a forthright, muscular account of Dvořák's Cello Concerto, high on power and projection if low on fragility and tenderness.

The concert's opener – the piquant miniatures of Qigang Chen's *The Five Elements* – showed off the orchestra's remarkable finesse and balance magnificently.

DAVID KETTLE