

Symphony Orchestra of India with Marat Bisengaliev

Usher Hall, Edinburgh

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WOULD you count its Scottish-sounding names to check a Scottish orchestra's authenticity? Probably not. Which makes it problematic, of course, to draw attention to the mere handful of Indian players in the Symphony Orchestra of India.

But the SOI is a work in progress, a long-term project kicked off as recently as 2006 to build a Western-style ensemble and a broader appreciation of Western classical music on the Subcontinent, and one that involves education and training as much as it does performance. And judging by its bright, eager Usher Hall performance, what the SOI might currently lack in sheen and experience, it more than makes up for with vitality, vibrancy and abundant charm.

Weber's Oberon Overture made for a slightly tentative start, coaxed into being by conductor Martyn Brabbins's clear, confident gestures. Then the Orchestra's co-founder, Kazakh-born violinist Marat Bisengaliev, gave a gloriously assertive, chiselled account of Bruch's First Violin Concerto, each phrase impeccably defined, his finale bracingly energetic. It made for a fascinating foil to the pastel-hued whimsy the much-loved Concerto sometimes generates, though in his determination to be heard Bisengaliev perhaps lacked a little fragility.

A brightly coloured Rimsky-Korsakov Sheherazade brought the concert to a thrilling, confident close, full of vivid storytelling, with wonderfully resonant brass playing the wife-killing Sultan and orchestra leader Adelina Hasani limpid and touching as the seductive storyteller. It had built up quite a head of steam by its stirring finale, though never at the expense of detail.

Elgar's Salut d'amour made for a lovingly crafted encore, expertly caressed by Brabbins and delivered with style.

DAVID KETTLE