

Reviews

MUSIC

The St Petersburg Symphony Orchestra & Peter Donohoe

Usher Hall, Edinburgh

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RUSSIAN orchestras can have a habit of doing things their own way, claimed UK pianist Peter Donohoe in a Scotsman interview last week looking ahead to this perplexing concert. And never more so than in Russian music, it seems, on the strength of their often rather unconvincing playing.

The St Petersburg Symphony Orchestra is no doubt a fine band, as demonstrated by their moments of lightning-quick precision, rousing climaxes and sudden eruptions of passion. Which made it all the more frustrating that their playing was elsewhere so doggedly lacklustre.

They must have played Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Overture* thousands of times before – and their account sounded just like they had, weary and workaday, as though they were going through the motions. With its oddly balanced textures, cranky ensemble, disagreements over tempo

and solos seemingly cast aside, it was surprisingly unpersuasive, driven ever onwards by the expansive gestures of Alan Buribayev's relentless conducting, which paid little attention to the detail or meaning of the music.

Their concert closer, Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique Symphony*, fared better, getting stronger and stronger as it progressed, but there were still unresolved issues of balance and speed.

Thank heavens, then, for Donohoe himself, who gave a sparkling, muscular account of Rachmaninov's *Fourth Piano Concerto*, thrillingly alive to the music's unpredictable swerves of direction and tackling its terrifyingly virtuosic passagework with commanding insight. The orchestra was on more vibrant, incisive form in this rarely played piece – which only served to throw their tired performances elsewhere into perspective.

DAVID KETTLE

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Alison Moyet

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall

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FORTY years after she wrote