

Sound vision of ambition and excellence

MUSIC
ST ANDREWS VOICES
 VARIOUS VENUES,
 ST ANDREWS

SCOTLAND has a brand new music festival to add to its already bulging schedule. St Andrews Voices brought an intensive four days of vocal music to the town, and particularly impressive was the sheer diversity of its offerings, which looked at the voice from all perspectives, classical and way beyond. The first night alone brought world-renowned tenor Ian Bostridge (recipient of an honorary doctorate from St Andrews in 2003) in Schubert's chilling *Winterreise*, followed by a cappella hip-hop from London-based vocal quintet the Boxettes.

It was back to mainstream classical, though, for the Scottish Ensemble's concert with Canadian-born mezzo Sophie Harmsen at the Younger Hall on 19 October (★★★★★), and it was an unforgettable evening. In her opening opera arias of anger and madness by Handel, she virtually spat out the music at times, fixing the audience with a furious gaze, yet also spun simple melodies of effortless beauty. She closed the concert with more torment in Britten's solo cantata *Phaedra*, a 20-minute mini-opera depicting the ancient Greek queen's illicit love for her stepson Hippolytus. Harmsen's performance was so raw that it almost felt voyeuristic to be witnessing it, and it was matched by crisp, hard-edged playing from the musicians under Jonathan

Morton. It was the singer's UK debut performance, but she's clearly a name to watch.

Mercifully, things relaxed a bit in Glasgow-based dance group Company Chordelia's sophisticated, seductive late-night offering *Cabaret Chordelia* (★★★★) with singer Damian Thantrey in the Byre Theatre. It was a seamless hybrid of vocals and dance, combining sometimes gender-bending torch songs with fluid movements from a trio of dancers, sometimes poignant, sometimes saucy, and in the end deeply affecting.

Another baritone, Northern Irish-born Ben McAteer, clearly has quite a following in St Andrews, as shown in his well-attended morning recital in the Younger Hall on 20 October (★★★★). He was a chemistry student at the university until just two years ago, but he's now forging a successful vocal career, and with his velvety yet high-definition voice it's not hard to see why. He was eager, even coquettish in a selection from Schumann's op 39 *Liederkreis*, breaking into terrifying power for a shattering *Waldesgesprach*, and he delivered a rugged trio of numbers from Vaughan Williams's *Songs of Travel*. With his faultless diction and compelling sincerity, he's another name to watch.

It may take a little while for St Andrews Voices to establish the loyal audience it surely deserves, but judging by the sheer quality and ambition of the inaugural outing, it's been an enormous success.

DAVID KETTLE

Glasgow-based Company Chordelia offered sophisticated, seductive late-night song and dance

