

BBCSSO/Pintscher review – atmospheric novelty plus a modernist swirl

City Halls, Glasgow The composer/conductor Matthias Pintscher brought together works by three of his close friends – and a 20th-century titan

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Suave and fastidious, the German composer/conductor Matthias Pintscher has been artist-in-association of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra since 2010. He has been seen less in Glasgow since he became director of Parisian new-music bastion Ensemble Intercontemporain last season, but here he was back with classic Pintscher fare: a trio of atmosphere-heavy new works by close friends, plus a titan of 20th-century modernism.

The concert opened with Marko Nikodijević's *Cvetic, Kucica ... /La Lugubre Gondola*, a lugubrious soundscape of elegiac violas and thronging violins, through which Liszt's Venetian gondolas appear in blurred vision, or maybe slight seasickness. Nikodijević was inspired by a Kosovo-Albanian girl drowned in the Danube in 1999, and the 15 minutes of watery stasis come to a stark, eerie close.

The recent horn concerto *Hawk-eye* by Slovenian composer Vito Zuraj invites us to “imagine a hawk flying over a picturesque valley and having the ability to zoom in on any interesting detail below”, a neat conceit that gave soloist Saar Berger carte blanche to whirl, dive and generally flit about, musically speaking. Less fun was Manfred Trojahn's *Herbstmusik*, a laboriously hectic tangle of Viennese waltzes and Sibelius half-quotes.

No trace of pastiche in the second half, though: Pierre Boulez's iconic ... *explosante-fixe* ... could only be the work of one man. True, this 35-minute panoply of ensemble and flutes (Roy Amotz, Michael Cox and Yvonne Paterson) integrates slightly clunky MIDI technology that dates it firmly in the early 1990s – today's live sampling would be seamless – but the poise and dynamism of Boulez's instrumental writing keeps us spinning in seductive flux.

Pintscher's conducting typically prioritised fluidity and sheen, and all praise to the deft clarity of the BBCSSO's fearless players. It's not easy to make Boulez sound this effortless.

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