

RSNO, Glasgow Royal Concert Hall

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Music

RSNO

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall

Michael Tumelty

Four Stars

THERE was probably a dollop of sentiment mixed in with other emotions as Stephane Deneve returned to Scotland and the RSNO on Saturday. But there's no harm in sentiment, is there? Not for this old geezer, who was charmed to renew acquaintance with the charismatic Frenchman, with whom I spent many hours tearing apart music. And what a delight to meet again his beautiful daughter who told me with great pride that she is now "eight and a half". Aww.

Musically, Deneve presided over a well-played programme where the Auld Alliance connections ran deep. It made sense to preface Debussy's little Marche Ecossaise in an unbroken sequence with the pipe tune that inspired it, even if the Marche itself gives no indication of the revolution soon to erupt gently from Debussy's imagination.

The Scottish connection loomed large in James MacMillan's The Death of Oscar, a characteristic portrayal of Oscar, son of Ossian and a renowned warrior, represented by brilliant and evocative music as bellicose as it was reflective, sympathetic and ultimately poignant: pure MacMillan beyond the surface and into the DNA of his music. The emphasis shifted to the French connection in Ravel's blistering Left Hand Piano Concerto, with the Scottish element provided in the sheer steel, made from girders, of Steven Osborne's pulverising left hand. Wow.

The opulently Germanic textures and thrust of Strauss's Death and Transfiguration suggested no relevant connection; unless, of course, you know that Richard Strauss himself conducted this piece with this orchestra in this city in 1902. Then Deneve turned the whole concert inside out with his electrifying detonation of Ravel's La Valse, which duly imploded.

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