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Review

Music
Eric Ruske, RSAMD,
Glasgow
Michael Tumelty

The French Horn, as all music lovers are aware, is a smooth-talking delinquent of an instrument. It can coo and caress; it can produce the most seductive, mellifluous tone of any musical instrument, and at its most mellifluous it can insinuate itself into the bloodstream and quicken the pulse. But it is a temperamental and unreliable beast, inherently unstable in its tone, and given to spluttering, squawking, choking, throating, and cracking up at the slightest provocation, sounding then more like a wounded beast at bay.

All of which makes what American horn player Eric Ruske (deftly accompanied by Victor Sangjung) produced yesterday the more remarkable. If I tell you that seasoned professional horn and brass players were utterly agog at the end of his jam-packed, mini-marathon recital yesterday, during which he did not leave the stage once and passed long enough to empty the cistern of his windbox infernal machine, then you can understand how completely gobsmacked were the rest of us lesser mortals.

Ruske, who started his career at the top — as a principal in the Cleveland Orchestra — and has worked his way up ever since, is one of the world’s great musicians. As he roared through a dense programme of music — Bach, Mozart, Strauss, Gliere and numerous others — his endurance was a genuine marvel. But, even at full stretch — whether at speed in a Mozart Sonata or dead slow in Franz Strauss’s gorgeous Notturno, at the very top or deepest depths of the instrument, or in his sensational final performance of Monti’s Csardas, every note was pure music — no bravado, no display for its own sake. Sweet stuff.