

Review: Scottish Chamber Orchestra/Ticciati, with Viktoria Mullova (violin), Usher Hall, 13 October 2011 (****)

☒ The world premiere of *storm, rose, tiger* by the young Glasgow-born composer Martin Suckling opened Thursday night's concert Usher Hall by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and if this astonishingly confident and likeable work is anything to go by, the SCO's bold decision to put five new commissions in its 2011-12 season was a wise one.

Inspired by a short story by Jorge Luis Borges, the piece was described as being about the act of creation itself – and its arresting sounds and strong sense of forward propulsion indeed gave it an appealing logic and sense of inevitability. Suckling's extensive use of microtones – musical intervals smaller than the semitones on which most music is based – meant that the piece had a strange poetry, as though it was not so much out of tune as dealing in a heightened reality. The SCO's performance was alive to the music's inpetuous energy yet also full of sensitivity, and in a precise, controlled reading conductor Robin Ticciati ensured that the piece's moments of expectant stillness were suitably suggestive.

Ticciati's abundant energy was very much to the fore in the glowing Schumann Fourth Symphony that followed – with no score in front of him, he seemed to dance and leap on the podium, summoning an effusive performance from the orchestra. Schumann may not be the most gifted symphonic composer, but Ticciati made the most of the material, with a beautifully transparent,

period-inflected string sound and an infectious feeling of fun in the finale.

Russian-born violinist Viktoria Mullova was the soloist in Beethoven's expansive Violin Concerto, and her performance was high on contrast, low on empty gesture. It was as though she had carefully weighed and considered every phrase, before delivering it with impeccable technique and a clear intention. Despite moments where it suddenly burst into flames, her interpretation was generally restrained, and there was a poignant fragility to some of Mullova's playing, especially in the slow movement, that cast whole sections of the piece in a new light. Ticciati ensured that the orchestra was on sprightly good form, and the natural horns and crisp timpani strokes only added to a performance that was clean, precise and thoughtful.

The Scottish Chamber Orchestra plays Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven at [The Queen's Hall](#) on Saturday 22 October.