

The three works in Dundee Symphony Orchestra's concert in St Paul's Cathedral on Saturday night can be summed up in three words...pleasure, disappointment and joy. The first and third showed the orchestra at their very best, but the middle one fell short of the mark despite the efforts of the orchestra.

Schumann's Cello concerto is a lovely work, sadly seldom performed, and I was looking forward in particular to its performance. To be frank, this left a lot to be desired. I don't think soloist Clea Friend ever really got to grips with it, and while her performance was not exactly lacklustre, there was room for improvement. Although the bottom register was secure enough, several intonation problems were evident in the higher register. The balance wasn't good at times, the orchestra masking her on occasion despite her performing on a raised dais, and there were instances when she and the orchestra were not quite together although the blame for this should not all be apportioned to her.

It wasn't all doom and gloom, however. The second movement of this seamless work had some lovely moments, with her musical conversation with the principal cellist coming over very well indeed, as did the urgent build-up to the final section.

The "pleasure" was in the form of Mendelssohn's Overture for Wind. It is rare for a wind section to be given their own "spot" in a concert but the players of the DSO deserved their moment of glory thanks to some sterling endeavours within the full orchestra over the years. It is a splendid work, containing some resemblance to the composer's Midsummer Night's Dream music, and I thought the performance was excellent.

The "joy" was Beethoven, and his second symphony. This was a knock-out! Conductor Robert Dick has a happy knack of bringing the best out of the orchestra in symphonies and this was no exception. It was first class from start to finish, and you would have been hard-pushed to spot any blemish. For an amateur orchestra, it was nothing less than a five-star performance and one that would have satisfied even the most hard-to-please Beethoven devotee.