



Reviews

Summer Chamber Classics - St Petersburg NCH, Dublin

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Shostakovich - Cello Sonata. Piano Quintet. **Stravinsky** - Soldier's Tale Suite. **Tchaikovsky** - Souvenir de Florence.

The second of the National Concert Hall's summer series exploring the legacies of three European cities focused on St Petersburg. The series artistic director, Finghin Collins, took a little licence with his self-imposed brief, by including Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale Suite* rather than anything the composer actually wrote in St Petersburg.

It was, however, a wise decision, as it was the Stravinsky which provided the finest playing of the evening, with clarinettist John Finucane in top form, whether he was called upon to cackle, insinuate, or simply run riot. The *Tango, valse, ragtime* movement was violinist Elizabeth Cooney's show, with, in spite of the dance names, the music still running in Stravinskian changing metres. And Collins himself was an expert aider and abetter at all times.

The opening performance of Shostakovich's Cello Sonata, with Collins and French cellist Marc Coppey was rather lacklustre, as if the two players were moving through the piece with too much independence of spirit, in spite of their well co-ordinated playing.

The St Petersburg String Quartet's performances of Shostakovich's Piano Quintet (with Collins) and Tchaikovsky's string sextet, *Souvenir de Florence* (with John Lynch, viola, and Coppey), will have provided a fascinating contrast for anyone who heard the same pieces at the recent West Cork Chamber Music Festival, where they were played by members of the Kopelman and RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartets and pianist Elisabeth Leonskaja.

The tendency in Bantry was for much in both works to be presented as a kind of miniature violin concerto, with Mikhail Kopelman in the spotlight. Democracy prevailed in Dublin, and a much warmer and more relaxed view of the Tchaikovsky presented an altogether more genial side of the piece.

There was much more of light and shade in the Shostakovich, too, though Collins was a much more consistent presence at the piano than Leonskaja had been. She chose to dominate certain moments to an extent which he didn't approach, but she also melted into the background, too, blending with the strings with extraordinary subtlety. But

Leonskaja was not matched by her colleagues. Wednesday's Dublin performance was altogether richer in variety of texture and range of expression.