

## BBCSSO/McGegan

★★★★★ City Halls, Glasgow

**Rowena Smith**

**Tuesday January 23, 2007**

**[The Guardian](#)**

Mendelssohn's ability to write a good tune has done his reputation few favours. Nevertheless, anyone tempted to dismiss his works as pretty but insubstantial would have done well to hear the BBCSSO and Nicholas McGegan, whose performance of the Scottish Symphony was far from merely picturesque.

But before the Mendelssohn came Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto, with Robert Levin as soloist. Despite being a scholar-pianist and authority on classical performance practice, Levin clearly knows how to put the fun into musicological erudition. His first movement cadenza, improvised in the classical manner, whirled the movement off in stormy new directions before embarking on a bravura reprise of its main themes. It was a display that elicited an inter-movement round of applause - as it probably would have done in Beethoven's day. In the rondo finale, Levin teased orchestra and conductor with playful changes of direction to which they responded in kind, resulting in a humour-filled dialogue.

Fascinating after the concerto was the way McGegan approached Mendelssohn's symphony in the same way, making it full of dramatic contrasts and abrupt changes. With the BBCSSO on superb form, responding to every gesture, there were surprises to be had in this most familiar work, especially the latent edge of menace introduced by the repeated brass fanfares of the first movement, which lingered throughout the work. If the majestic, major-key coda still failed to convince entirely, here at least it seemed to suggest a victory won rather than an uneasy appendage to the piece.

There was a picturesque Scottish element to the programme, provided not by Mendelssohn but by Sally Beamish's 2002 concerto for orchestra, *Sangsters*, based on a Scots poem whose music echoes the evocative movement titles.