

National Youth Orchestra of Scotland

Perth Concert Hall

Michael Tumelty

Four stars

HOWEVER it happened, Scotland's concert audience gave the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland a tremendous send-off on Wednesday night on the eve of their China tour. Just a week earlier, NYOS admin was worried it was going to be a thinly-attended event. Whether it was extra publicity or plain old word of mouth, the crowd turned out in force and the atmosphere in Perth Concert Hall was hot, steamy and electric in its buzz.

And the NYOS musicians were in white-hot form, with Rory Macdonald super-flexible and versatile at the conducting helm. Together they turned out two of the finest NYOS performances I have ever heard, with an explosively-virtuosic account of Shostakovich's Festival Overture as the opener that had the folk around me gasping audibly in wonder. At the other end of the night Macdonald and those dazzling youngsters, welded into an indivisible ensemble, which professionals could only have admired, produced a breath-taking performance of Rachmaninov's great Second Symphony that was powered by so much inner momentum and volatility of mood you dared not take your eye off the ball. I don't know when I was last so gripped by the piece: it was protean and organic; it was dark, moody and blazingly-extrovert in its finale; it had everything: just wonderful. What young stars. This and the Shostakovich will be a smash in China.

However, I'll also be interested to hear how Erik Chisholm's Piobaireachd Piano Concerto, played with brilliant authority by Danny Driver, goes down. Its melodies and foot-tapping rhythms are infectious. But am I really alone in thinking it's far too long, and sprawling in its structure?