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## SCO/Ticciati; Concert

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Usher Hall, Edinburgh

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The Scottish Chamber Orchestra's 40th birthday celebration was never going to involve drowning its sorrows in a few pints of Scotland's finest - although I can't speak for the musicians after Thursday's birthday gig - but then 40, in orchestral years, is but a snip.

If the (very tasteful) party pizzazz was saved for later, it was the breadth and richness of the orchestra that was in focus. A somewhat sober start, then, with associate composer **Martin Suckling's** intriguing, celebratory new work, Six Speechless Songs, a musical millefeuille of gossamer slips and question-mark slivers. Suckling's microtonal sound world blurred in and out of focus, the layers occasionally crushed together in distinctive disarray. Elsewhere, a skirl and drone remnant of reimagined bagpipes, somewhat bleak, and a fourth song that, in true party fashion, amiably staggered into a gentle reel before dozing off. In between, defiant skeins, a few breaths, and it was gone.

The idea of Maria João Pires playing Chopin is to many a birthday present in itself, despite lacking real challenge for the orchestra. Effortlessly surmounting the Piano Concerto No 2, Pires gave the abundant virtuosic runs liquid life, although the second movement wavered under her contained elegance. As the mazurka rhythms of the third movement finally triumphed, the ever-chameleonic SCO proved themselves in a symbiotic accompaniment that matched all Pires's richness and dynamic.

To finish, Robin Ticciati romped through Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. As balloons dropped on the audience to the strains of the viola player Steve King's jaunty

arrangement of Happy Birthday, Ticciati's birthday wish for a venue that would bring together orchestra and administration under one roof seemed a no-brainer.

Sarah Urwin Jones

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