

ARTS



LEFT: Rob MacKillop with a selection of lutes, an instrument he is determined to save from obscurity

PLUCK'N'ROLL REVIVAL

Jim Gilchrist talks to Rob MacKillop, whose rare talents on the lute have voiced a song of healing after the horrors of 11 September

Rob MacKillop sat in his hotel room, puzzled, watching the first airliner punch into the first tower. The TV commentary was in Arabic, so he didn't initially understand what was happening, or that the stricken skyscraper was in New York. He quit his room for a walk on the streets of Casablanca and, entering a cybercafé to email home, found crowds watching the catastrophe on a big colour screen. "It was a very strange moment when I walked in. It was very clear that a lot of them had been cheering, but they went dead quiet, thinking I was American. I explained I was a Scot and asked what was going on. They told me."

On that black-letter day of 11 September last year, MacKillop, an acclaimed luter – he favours the old Scots term for a lutenist – was in Casablanca on a Churchill Travelling Fellowship, investigating the roots of Scottish lute music in

the sounds he was hearing in his head that sleepless night – ultimately resolve themselves in a bagpipe-like coronach, chiming out pibroch-style variations.

Surprisingly so, perhaps, bearing in mind his immersion at the time in Islamic music? "I didn't want to do anything that smacked of pastiche or fusion," he explains. "I was there to try and understand their music, but I was also emulating the medieval lute players. They brought this instrument back but didn't write pseudo-Turkish or Arabic music for it; they wrote Scottish music."

The *Healing* is MacKillop's latest attempt at what he terms "wrenching the lute away from the early music thing, while respecting its heritage". Featuring lute and 18th-century Scots cittern, it spans material from the mid-17th century to the present day. There is, for example, the ancient *Port Atholl* – which is as "one of the most sublime pieces of Scot-

Wings beating maybe, or the closing of your eyes.

"I thought James's reading was magnificent," says MacKillop. "We did it on the first take, really."

The Tayport-based musician lectures in lute at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow but, as a professional performer, he still suffers from the "Is it classical? Is it folk?" syndrome that afflicts British audiences. With seven CDs so far, ranging from medieval to 18th-century periods, he is now anxious to record from a 19th-century Edinburgh manuscript of guitar music he unearthed, as well as contemporary composer Peter Maxwell Davies's settings of the Orkney poet George Mackay Brown.

Trying to drum up funding for such projects, however, is a constant preoccupation, and he sees much modern music as the resuscitation of a rich but largely neglect-

Reviews

The Two Pigeons ★★★★★

Edinburgh Festival Theatre

VERSATILITY is becoming a watchword at Scottish Ballet.

Their last venture saw them playing giant fruit in *The Snowman*. Prior to that, their *Mixed Programme* indicated a definite grasp of the modern idiom.

Artistic director Robert North may soon be bidding them *adieu*, but he can leave safe in the knowledge that his dancers have more strings to their bow than when he arrived.

And *The Two Pigeons*, it would seem, trill quite a melodious swansong.

For although Sir Frederick Ashton has the choreography credit, it is North who has primed the performers to deliver this work with such verve.

Flamboyant gypsy girl Lorna Scott blazes across the floor like a wild stallion, commanding our attention.

No small achievement, given that she shares the stage with former Royal Ballet star, Sarah Wildor, whose comical, yet touching, young girl is characterised to perfection.

A crowd-pleasing narrative ballet, *Two Pigeons* will satiate those who yearn for a story.

Those of a more abstract bent can seek solace in North's *Bach Dances*.

Set to seven beautiful movements, this homage to the great composer finds Bach conducting the corps de ballet like notes on a page.

North may be flying the nest soon, but the dancers looked totally at home performing his work.

Kelly Apter

● His Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen, 10-13 April; Theatre Royal, Glasgow, 16-20 April; Eden Court, Inverness, 25-27 April

Scottish Chamber Orchestra ★★★★★

City Halls, Glasgow

A COMBINATION of needle-sharp clarity and whim-driven spontaneity gave last week's Romantic concoction by the SCO a distinctive air. The diminutive conductor Emmanuel Krivine showed his mastery of menace in Weber's overture *Der Freischütz*, before entering the anguished world of Berlioz's *La Morte de Cléopâtre*, with sensational singing from Michelle DeYoung, towering over even the podium-mounted Krivine, and with a voice as colossal as her stature. The closing work was a lesson on how Schumann need not sound as flawed as some claim his music to be – this *Second Symphony* was laced with fluidity and finesse.

Kenneth Walton

Royal Scottish National Orchestra ★★

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall

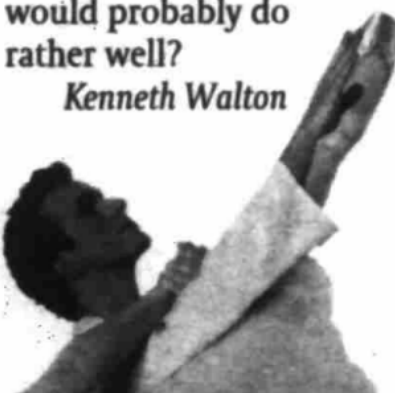
UNDER Austrian conductor Christopher Eberle, the RSNO blew hot and cold. In the blazing finale of Mahler's *First Symphony*, and the neatly knitted opening of Mozart's *Symphony No 29*, spines tingled.

But the Mahler was ultimately all over the shop and Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending* (with leader Edwin Paling as soloist) lacked atmosphere. The scaled-down Mozart proved the RSNO should get out in smaller units more often.

It would help the violins, especially, lose their occasional self-consciousness.

Isn't that a project in-house assistant conductor Garry Walker, as a cellist, would probably do rather well?

Kenneth Walton



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