

Review

O'Connor, ICO/
Takács-Nagy
University Concert Hall,
Limerick

MICHAEL DERVAN

Mozart - Symphony No 15.

Beethoven - Piano Concerto No 2.

Liszt - *Angelus! Prière aux anges gardiens*. Bartók - *Divertimento*.

The Irish Chamber Orchestra didn't manage to find an opening in the busy schedule of Christmas concerts at the National Concert Hall. So the orchestra's final programme of this year, with John O'Connor as soloist and Gábor Takács-Nagy conducting, was heard only in Limerick and Cork.

In Limerick on Thursday, Takács-Nagy brought to the pre-Mozart-sounding world of the 16-year-old Mozart's *Symphony in G, K124*, something of the fervour and sharpness you might expect from a maverick such as Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach.

John O'Connor approached Beethoven's *Piano Concerto in B flat* with an effective combination of musical directness and high spirits, though the dryness of the University Concert Hall acoustic presented the tone of the piano in an unflattering light.

Liszt's *Angelus! Prière aux anges gardiens*, the opening piece of the third book of the composer's *Années de Pèlerinage*,

was not given in the original version for piano, but in a string arrangement two generations removed from that. Liszt himself arranged the piece for string quartet and the English musician, Walter Bache, arranged it for string orchestra for a visit to London by Liszt in 1886.

On Thursday, both the arrangement and the performance seemed to want to conventionalise a piece which works by blending apparent plainness with quirky moves into the unexpected.

Takács-Nagy, the original leader of the Takács Quartet, will be fondly remembered by a generation of Irish music-lovers for the quartet's stream of insightful Bartók performances. And, from the start of Thursday's performance of the 1939 *Divertimento* for strings, it was clear that he has lost nothing of his special view of his famous Hungarian compatriot. It was as if a new orchestra had placed itself on stage and created a new acoustic around it.

Commentators have struggled to reconcile the idea of an 18th-century-inspired *Divertimento*, with all that implies in terms of lightness, being written in the face of imminent war by a strongly anti-Fascist composer whose mother was also terminally ill. Takács-Nagy and the ICO managed to cast all such conundrums aside. Their performance was so rich and so persuasive that there was nothing to do but bask in the amazing fullness and complexity of what they managed to present.