



THE SCOTSMAN

FRIDAY, 13 AUGUST 2004

Festival

COMEDY DUEL

★★★
ASSEMBLY ROOMS
(Venue 3)

THIS is terrific stuff – informed, intelligent, and occasionally quite insane. The show is comedy in music. Just music. No words. Believe me, you do not for one moment miss them.

Paul Staicu is a Romanian cross between Art Garfunkel and Charlie Chaplin with the hands of a concert pianist. Having said that, he plays pretty mean jazz, Beethoven and Debussy from under the piano.

He remixes Piaf with Stravinsky, plays while blindfolded, gagged and handcuffed and has one of the show's funniest moments with an "automated piano system".

Like any good thing, there are strings attached. Luckily for us, in this case they are on the cello played by Laurent Cirade – one of few top-notch

musicians whom, when you talk of their body of work, has a body as good as that work. Laurent makes tuning up a comic art form, sings *My Funny Valentine* in a voice like fur-coated Chaliapin, dances a sexy tango to the Bach *Gounod Ave Maria*, reveals himself to be a brilliant character comic and plays cello with a chainsaw.

And he can really play. *Caprice de Servais* is a ferociously tricky piece written by the man who invented the bow (Servais must have had something like Cirade in his wildest dreams).

Then there's the theme from *Star Trek*, in crystal clear harmonics and a duet on digeridoo and cello that turns into a trio once he is handcuffed to Staicu.

The whole show is, if anything, greater than the sum of its parts, which is as it should be. The two play, in more than one sense of the word, off each other perfectly.

Kate Copstick

Until 29 August. Today 4:10pm