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Music theatre Balanescu Trio LSO St Luke's, ECI

★★★★☆

Multitasking is one thing; Gisele Edwards is another. A Cambridge graduate in Chinese, a composer, actor and City equity analyst by day, her *real* passion is twisting round a rope as an aerialist, in which daring role she collaborates with musicians to create works that defy categorisation. Are they circus, dance, music theatre, mime or just jaw-dropping acts of madness? Whatever, the phrase “just hanging around” has rarely been elevated to such artistic heights.

Her latest venture, a UBS commission called *Ties*, has been conceived with two equally irrepressible spirits: Alexander Balanescu and Evelina Petrova. He is a trilby-wearing Romanian violinist who flits like a weighty butterfly from classical to jazz to Eastern European folk styles, but brings a virtuoso touch to them all. She is a Russian accordionist, singer and composer who is prone to break into whimpers, screeches and squeaks, even as her hands conjure

amazing multipart counterpoint in some wild, Balkan, 19-in-a-bar metre.

Quite a barmy trio then. And in *Ties* they make Anaïs Nin's ménage with Mr and Mrs Henry Miller seem almost coy — for the work seems to be about Edwards's pert little gymnast character getting under the skin of, and disrupting the relationship between, Balanescu and Petrova. The latter respond with snarling rows, touching reconciliations and sly little reciprocal flirtations with the soaring aerialist, all conveyed entirely in music without dialogue.

What was pre-composed, what generated in rehearsal and what improvised on the spot is impossible to detect. But the piece (directed by Emma Bernard) is striking, unusual, fun and happily defiant of categorisation.

Earlier in this show, presented cabaret-style to a sell-out audience seated at tables, Balanescu and Petrova had duetted, and sometimes danced, in a style that had scarcely any less visual drama. Her pieces are musically more complex and harmonically daring, but both are capable of such quick-witted interplay that the result is like some lightning-fast comedy dialogue. Sample the sounds, if not the sights, on an album they have released called *Upside Down*.

Richard Morrison