

Concert Review – Bay of Plenty Symphonia “Northern Lights”

Baycourt, Sunday 21 November, 2021

It's difficult to find the words to express the tremendous swelling of pride one felt after hearing our own Bay of Plenty Symphonia's *Northern Lights* programme on Sunday afternoon. Are there no limits to Maestro Rozemond's ambition and his vision for this remarkable assemblage of musicians? Under Rozemond's masterful leadership, the orchestra delivered a powerful and stirring performance of an extraordinarily challenging programme of works.

The opening of Smetana's tone-poem *Sárka* was both fiery and energetic and perfectly set the tone and expectations for the remainder of the afternoon. The orchestra brilliantly navigated and accentuated the tumultuous drama this work demands. Hayden Butt (winner of the Symphonia's Rising Star competition just weeks ago), delivered the central clarinet solo which was lovely and moving.

From the delicate and intimate opening of the Symphonia's muted strings to the splendour of the orchestra's full might, Rozemond captured perfectly the magnificent and imposing nature of the Finnish landscape in Sibelius's *Violin Concerto in D Minor* featuring soloist, Martin Riseley. Of Riseley's virtuosity, there can be no doubt, but equal to the task was the ever-responsive and competent accompaniment provided from maestro and orchestra.

The Symphonia opened the second half of their concert with the Act 2 forest scene from Wagner's masterpiece, *Siegfried* - a bold and ambitious choice for a concert programme. After an extremely challenging opening for celli and basses (handled in true Wagnerian style - heroically), there was no mistaking our forest locale. The beautiful bird song delivered by the flutes, oboes and clarinets captured perfectly the atmosphere of Wagner's wooded oasis.

Shostakovich's *9th Symphony* is perhaps too light-hearted and playful for its own good. Shortly after its composition, the composer would find himself on unsteady ground with Soviet leadership who begged the question, is 1945 the right time to be celebrating the defeat of Nazism with such gaiety and childishness. Nevertheless, these are exactly what qualities the Symphonia so expertly conveyed in their absolutely riveting and thrilling delivery of this work. Special mention must be made of the fine clarinet solo work of Kimberly Jones and the beautifully melancholic bassoon solo of Sam Brough. Indeed, this symphony features some of the finest ensemble wind playing I've ever heard from this orchestra. The final movement built to a fantastically satisfying climax in a spectacularly chaotic and ridiculous dance.

For many musicians, the names Smetana, Sibelius, Wagner and Shostakovich are synonymous with endurance, fortitude, and stamina (in every sense). This was a truly exacting programme. Congratulations to Maestro Rozemond and the Bay of Plenty Symphonia for pulling it off with such determination and conviction. What a rewarding afternoon and how lucky this community is to have an orchestra that takes such bold musical chances.

Chalium Poppy