

# Concert Review

## Bay of Plenty Symphonia

### 20 November 2022

Tauranga ought to be bursting with pride for its resident orchestra - the Bay of Plenty Symphonia - who delivered a milestone performance on Sunday afternoon. *Celebrating Greatness* was an incredibly ambitious orchestral programme carefully curated to not only showcase the very best of the orchestra's immeasurable talent but also, as the name suggests, a cause to simply celebrate. 2022 marks the 10 year anniversary of Maestro Justus Rozemond as Conductor.

Quite appropriately, the concert began with a truly iconic work by one of Aotearoa's most iconic composers- *The Drysdale Overture* by Douglas Lilburn (composed 1937). New Zealand music performed by a New Zealand orchestra. And while staple repertoire for many New Zealand orchestras, this overture is always fresh and there is something new to be found in every hearing. Its composition marks both a turning point in the development of New Zealand music but also firmly plants the fledgling nation on a musical world stage. The Symphonia, under the able baton of Maestro Rozemond, captured something of the uniqueness and serenity of the New Zealand landscape that is so inherent in this work. The orchestra painted exquisite sound portraits which evoke the vast Turakina Valley, pastoral visions of sheep peacefully grazing on the hillsides, while the songs of birds flood the heavens.

Rounding out the first half of the programme was Louis Spohr's *Second Clarinet Concerto* featuring Stefenie Pickston. Spohr, like Beethoven, bridges the musical divide between the Classical and Romantic Periods. Unlike, Beethoven, however, he clearly possessed a singular fondness for the clarinet having written no fewer than four concerti in total for the instrument (writing only more concerti for the violin, by comparison).

Pickston was an outstanding choice for soloist and more than proved herself a consummate musician. She is clearly well on her way to an international musical career if she so chooses. More than that, being in her final year of musical studies at Waikato University, she is a perfect fit for the Symphonia's ethos of showcasing and encouraging the very best of our young talent. Pickston performed with incredibly mature sensitivity - every phrase teeming with understanding and gentility. Her technical skill and virtuosity is truly without blemish, but it was the tenderness of the central *Adagio* movement which was perhaps most captivating. While it was not made clear that she had learned this concerto specifically for this concert programme, it was performed with such ease and effort that one could be forgiven for assuming she had been playing it her entire life.

Pickston was very competently and sensitively supported by the Symphonia with Maestro Rozemond at the helm; the orchestra and soloist blending seamlessly and complimenting one another with delicate consideration.

The second half of the concert was dedicated entirely to Schubert's expansive *Ninth Symphony*. What an inspired selection for such an illustrious and celebratory occasion. Schubert's symphonic works are so often overlooked in favour of his lied or smaller

chamber works, but the *Ninth Symphony* is comparable in scope and majesty to any of Beethoven's.

The Symphonia performed the outer movements with an exciting energy; they brimmed with anticipation and expectation. The *Andante* contained moments of exquisite beauty and particular mention must be made of the most serene and sensuous string playing - particularly the Symphonia celli.

Schubert's *Great Symphony* is a musical marathon requiring unflinching focus and relentless determination. While the demanding and taxing nature of the work was immediately evident, not for one moment was the Symphonia overwhelmed or defeated by it. On the contrary, this was, at least for this listener, a monumental moment in the life of this orchestra who played with strength and confidence. It would not be possible for the orchestra to play any finer than this and by its conclusion, the tremendous sense of pride and accomplishment exuding from the orchestra was both palpable and infectious within the auditorium.

Congratulations to the Bay of Plenty Symphonia and to their dauntless conductor, Justus Rozemond. What has been accomplished in the last decade is truly remarkable and is a testament to visionary leadership and persistent determination.

For those who have never had the pleasure of a symphony orchestra experience, keep an eye open for announcements of their 2023 season. The Bay of Plenty Symphonia is a regional treasure. Not only are they an ensemble of fine enthusiastic musicians who care deeply for symphonic music, but they also provide a unique and vital training ground for our future orchestral players.

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