



## Orchestra presents a stellar soloist again in 'astonishingly beautiful' Gautier Capucon



### MUSIC

- **What: New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.**
- **Where: Auckland Town Hall.**

**I**N A YEAR of star turns, the most recent being August's Zukerman Experience, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra presented yet another stellar soloist in Gautier Capucon.

The Frenchman had been marketed as "astonishingly beautiful", a rather saucily appropriated quote from the English press that in fact was a reference to his playing; as it happened, in both appearance and music-making, the young cellist more than justified the promo that had preceded him.

Sibelius's Tapiola was a sombre launch for Friday's concert but conductor Pietari Inkinen captured the Finnish composer's brooding forestscape in sound, with particularly sterling work from the strings.

Sibelius famously railed against his contemporaries' obsession with counterpoint; this performance reminded one of the power of his primal vision.

At the end of the concert, Sibelius's Second Symphony caught us in its irresistible sweep, thanks to Inkinen's mastery in building inevitable momentum

through motivic flow.

Richard Strauss's Don Quixote can come across as a cumbersome cello concerto manqué, but Capucon was very much "part of the team", engaging with Robert Ashworth, whose forthright viola made quite a character out of Sancho Panchez.

Inkinen fired his orchestra to the hilt and one wondered whether those atonal sheep had ever bleated more deliriously in the second variation. Yet, in the more modestly scored fifth variation, Capucon's heartrenching lyricism found itself in a beautifully finessed chamber music setting

On Saturday, Saint-Saens' A minor Concerto proved a revelation. Balancing forcefulness with elegance, Capucon easily seduced us with the sheer grunt of his Goffriller cello, especially in its lower register. The most striking moments were his ultra-romantic take on the Concerto's second theme and coy grace of the Minuet.

The encore was as apt as it was unexpected — Massenet's "Meditation", a hoary old salon piece of yore, spun like gossamer, against feathery orchestration.

Surrounding this very Gallic bracket, the rest of Saturday's concert was bracingly upbeat. Shostakovich's perky Festival Overture left one feeling this was a TV theme looking for a show, while Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra revealed that this orchestra is a collection of fine soloists.

Inkinen brought the impetuosity of youth to the Hungarian's score, and it came out effectively in the dramatic shadings of the first movement, the almost hip dance steps of the second and, above all, the whoop and exhilaration of the Finale.