



Conductor's vision galvanises players

WHAT: New Zealand Symphony Orchestra conducted by Mark Wigglesworth with Alexander Melnikov (piano). Music by Debussy, Rachmaninov and Shostakovich,
WHERE: Michael Fowler Centre, August 1.
REVIEWED BY: John Button.



Mark Wigglesworth: Big reputation.

Debussy's *Prelude a l'après-midi d'un faune*.

From the off, with the marvellous poise of Bridget Douglas' flute, we heard playing of wonderful, languorous, refinement, culminating in some sumptuously glowing playing from the strings.

THIS was a finer concert than the first featuring these two visiting artists.

I'm sure the fact that this was the fifth time the programme had been played had much to do with the coherence and precision of the orchestral playing.

Precision is not the full deal in the Shostakovich *Tenth Symphony*, though it surely helps. No, the success of this performance was due to the vision and execution of conductor Mark Wigglesworth.

He enjoys a huge reputation in Shostakovich's music. He galvanised his players to produce playing that moved from the sensitive to the sensational; from the superb playing of individual players, to a riveting intensity in climaxes.

Never have I heard the "Stalin" scherzo played with such trenchant bite, nor have I heard such superb balances between all sections, including the percussion, as here.

The concert opened superbly, with

Rachmaninov's *Second Piano Concerto* is so popular it has affected the composer's reputation.

It is a heart-on-the-sleeve work, made popular by use in countless films – David Lean's 1945 *Brief Encounter*, for example – and its melodies have been appropriated for many a song.

But it remains a powerful, effective work and Alexander Melnikov played it superbly. Although not note-perfect – some of his playing was distinctly splashy – it was stylistically absolutely right.

Even better was his Rachmaninov encore – the *B minor Prelude* from *Op.32* – where we heard the type of playing that has seen him recognised as one of the finest Rachmaninov pianists before us today.