



Symphonic Britten set tone for dynamic concerts

BRITTEN'S *Sinfonia da Requiem* was a brave launch for the first of Mark Wigglesworth's concerts with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. A work of the early 40s, one could hear the great breaths of tumultuous times in the opening *Lacrymosa* and sense them, too, in the English conductor's body movements.

Wigglesworth seemed to find the spirit of a barbed *Rossini* lurking in the scurry of the *Dies Irae* and brought all to a stirring resolution in the final *Requiem aeternam*.

On Saturday a rapturous account of Debussy's *L'Après-Midi d'un faune* was steeped in languor, again signposted by Wigglesworth on his podium.

Symphonically, Friday was Haydn's night and his 90th Symphony is a score suffused with incident and invention. All was given its due, from the graceful

MUSIC

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

nonchalance of its initial *Adagio* to that catherine wheel of a finale, bristling with fanfares, jabbing counterpoints and impish humour.

If there was humour in Shostakovich's 10th Symphony on Saturday then it had a manic tinge to it; any wayward circus spirits in its fiery second movement were distributing sawdust liberally laced with acid. Wigglesworth's insightful programme note suggested he had thought long and hard

about this work, and few conductors could equal his first movement in its balance of the stoic sorrow and repressed anger.

On both evenings, Alexander Melnikov came up with the sort of pianism that we read about in European dispatches.

The Russian's Brahms on Friday lacked nothing in majesty or gravity. Every note of the D minor Concerto was duly pondered, with convincing dynamic readings that were often at odds with the composer's intentions. The piece proved to be an engrossing power struggle with the orchestra, finally reaching its thrilling *entente cordiale*, after more than a hint of a Hungarian dance.

Rachmaninov's Second Concerto must have accounted for the increased audience numbers on Saturday and this, too, sounded fresh with Melnikov's uncluttered lyricism.