



Reviews

Fitting finale to epic journey

WHAT: New Zealand Symphony Orchestra conducted by Pietari Inkinen: The Sibelius Festival - the final concert

WHERE: Michael Fowler Centre, September 19

REVIEWED BY: John Button

THE FINAL concert in this riveting survey of all seven Sibelius symphonies gave us three that are not often played in concert. *Symphony No 3* is a work that, as it unfolds, becomes more and more rhythmically insistent before driving all before it to a triumphant conclusion in C major.

Once again conductor Pietari Inkinen belied his years with an intuitive understanding that got right to the heart of the work, and he was supported, once again, by playing of surefooted understanding.

The second half was not only a fitting conclusion to a momen-

tous survey, but a proper statement of Sibelius' view of the symphony. Both the Sixth and Seventh symphonies are evolved statements of the composer's view of the symphony as a form - pure music without external references and complete in itself.

The Sixth is notoriously difficult to bring off. There are few moments of high drama, but, rather a succession of closely linked episodes over four, fairly short, movements. Sound and balance is everything; the string writing, though unspectacular on the surface, is extremely demanding, and the constant play of the timpani is crucial. In all these areas the orchestra excelled under Inkinen's skilful pacing, with Larry Reese's timpani absolutely right.

The Seventh symphony is possibly Sibelius' finest work. Unlike the vast final statements of Gustav Mahler, Sibelius

makes his statement in a distilled, one movement journey of less than half an hour. Yet the all-embracing nobility of it all is complete within a language that is tautness itself.

Its greatness has always made Sibelians wonder what might have been. Although there is evidence that sketches for an Eighth symphony existed they have never surfaced, and the composer remained creatively silent for the last 30 years of his life.

Inkinen led a wonderful performance, an appropriate final statement on this epic journey through the seven symphonies. We were left to reflect on the highly individual stature of the composer, the current excellence of an international quality orchestra and, above all, on the greatness of the Sibelius conducting of a conductor not yet thirty years of age.