



# Powerful music led by a master

**WHAT:** New Zealand Symphony Orchestra conducted by Pietari Inkinen. The Sibelius Festival - Concert 2.

**WHAT:** Michael Fowler Centre, Thursday.

**REVIEWED BY:** John Button.

**T**HIS second concert was never going to be as popular as the first, and so it proved, with the hall only a little over half full.

The *Fourth Symphony*, rarely performed in New Zealand, is not one of Sibelius' crowd pleasers.

It was composed between 1909 and 1911, a time when the composer had financial problems and was still recovering from a throat operation for cancer in 1908.

The *Fourth* is a brooding, dark affair that has never dazzled audiences, but it is also a masterpiece, distinguished by subtlety, concision and sheer individu-

ality, and never has that been more evident, in my experience, than in this extraordinary performance.

I have listened to, and absorbed, this powerful work during a great many years, I have reviewed it in concert and in recordings, but never have I heard the work so cogently interpreted, nor as superbly played.

Pietari Inkinen might be young in years, but even among his Finnish conducting peers he stands out in Sibelius.

His understanding of the *Fourth* was a masterclass in pacing, balance and nuance, and what wonderful playing he coaxed from the players, and what a response they all drew from the audience!

The playing of cellist David Chickering and some magical work from the woodwind will live long in the memory.

The *First Symphony* is a much more straightforward work. Although Sibelius' fingerprints are all over the work, one can clearly hear the Russian influences - the Scherzo contains some woodwind writing that is pure Borodin.

The sheer impetus and strong, clear melodies, balanced by dramatic brass outbursts, have always appealed to audiences, and this splendidly impelled performance was no exception.

Maybe the miraculous execution of the *Fourth* was not quite there, but one could admire the weight and sonority of the strings and, again, some full-throated brass playing.

A bit difficult, though, to criticise anything when faced with conducting and playing of the quality this concert offered.