

## Beethoven with a touch of Woodward

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### MUSIC

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FOR many concertgoers, attending a complete cycle of anything — 'The Ring', Bartok quartets, or La Stravaganza — entails a dual acquisition of virtue. Usually it means absorbing music in highly concentrated doses and at the end the listener is entitled to a feeling of self-congratulation tinged with relief.

Roger Woodward played the five Beethoven piano concertos last week at the Town Hall in two concerts with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra under Georg Tintner. The works were given in numerical sequence, the first three on Wednesday, and the G major and E flat ones on Saturday.

The first night contained far too much; the first half comprising two concertos and the Leonora Overture No. 2, was not over until after 9.30. Nevertheless, when a player of this calibre is let loose on music that he has a reputation of performing with innovative insight and often amazing vigor, there is little merit in complaining of indigestion.

Woodward can be a delight to watch, something that is true of few pianists. He puzzles you, as he did me on his first entry in the C major work, with a vehement left hand; he provokes your admiration with his rejection of the normal cross-hands procedure in this work's last movement — a



Roger Woodward: iconoclastic but illuminating.

sensible move if the technique involves control over rapid semi-quavers dovetailed between the hands.

Yet in the middle of all the aggression and skill come moments like the coda to the C minor work's first movement, where Woodward's arpeggios were ideally delicate; or his breathtaking and appropriate speed in the coda to the last movement.

The most disappointing performance of the series was that of the G major concerto. In the final rondo, Woodward's tempo fluctuations, and the discrepancies between soloist and orchestra due to these, blurred the score's finesse. It seemed to me that Woodward was put out by an idiotic interjection by somebody impatient with the tuner being called twice to attend to the instrument after the first movement.

Whatever happened, the final E flat concerto was a triumph; not flawless, but played with a deliberation and lucid articulation that bordered on being dangerous. It provided a fine conclusion to this Beethoven mini-series, and a tribute to the soloist's iconoclastic but illuminating interpretative powers.