

PASSIONATE PLAYING

REVIEW

Christchurch Symphony
Masterworks 7 Romantic
Rachmaninov, with Roger
Woodward (piano). Town Hall,
September 3. Reviewed by Patrick
Shepherd.

Romantic Rachmaninov? Is this a ploy to match the programming with the tacky chocolate box artwork hanging in the foyer? Well, it so easily could have been but for the supremely intelligent interpretation by pianist Roger Woodward and conductor Sir William Southgate. Add to that the inspired inclusion of Nielsen's brilliantly high tereile fifth symphony to provide the bite, the bitter to complement the sweet, and we had a programme to remember.

Woodward played with astonishing calm, tackling this mighty work more as one might a Chopin nocturne. This was certainly a case of less is more, capturing those introspective moods beautifully, but when the occasion demanded getting stuck in boots and all with uncompromising power. The anger with which he swept us into the finale was ferocious.

Through Woodward's interpretation I became much more aware of

the 20th century flavours and elements of jazz than I had in more indulgent interpretations. Of course, the piece itself owes much of its present popularity to the movie *Shine* where David Helfgott both elevated and butchered it but in Woodward I sensed the composer's real intentions. Here is a player with real integrity.

Southgate was absolutely in sync with his soloist and brought out the very best in the orchestral accompaniment, keeping swamping to a minimum.

Nielsen's fifth symphony is a tersely wrought work, with eruptions of passion held together by steel threads. The writing for solo clarinet and snare drum, reminiscent of the composer's clarinet concerto, is as striking as ever.

I was delighted to see the audience relish this brave and accomplished performance. The sound was always full of energy and excitement, relentlessly driven by Southgate's intense direction. Gee, he can whip up that orchestra.

Special mention for solo work must include Gretchen Dunsmore who took the clarinet solos in *Night on a Bare Mountain* and the Nielsen supremely well; extremely tricky both of them but you'd never know it.