

## MUSIC

# Bravado, drama and top music

**What:** New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and Roger Woodward (piano) conducted by Yoel Levi. Beatrice and Benedict Overture (Berlioz); Piano Concerto No 3 (Prokofiev); Divertimento in D, K136 (Mozart); Symphony No 41 in C (Mozart)

**Where:** Michael Fowler Centre, Saturday evening  
**Reviewed by:** Linds Taylor

Scheduled pianist Bruno Gelber cancelled a week before this concert and the orchestra was lucky to find Sydney-based Roger Woodward free on the night.

It is 20 years since this formidable Australian played in this country, and that was about 19 years too long; he is simply one of the best and certainly one of the most adventurous Australian pianists.

Instead of Gelber's Schumann, Woodward played Prokofiev's third and probably best known concerto. For timid souls who live in fear of breaking strings from minute to minute, the discomfort level would have been high.

But for those of us looking for excitement as well as finesse and poetry, the bout between Woodward - shaven-headed, threatening - and Steinway - responsive and yielding - was one of the most memorable of the season.

I have quite simply never heard a live performance of this work that so revealed its youthful bravado and drama, as well as its handling dealing so beautifully its long passages of calculated lyricism.

His speciality was striking low register notes so hard and with such commanding resonance, isolating them from their cocoon of calmly fluent scale or arpeggio passages.

But he was not the only star. Maestro Levi, conducting the concerto - as everything else - without score, drew an equally brilliant, spell-binding performance from the orchestra.

They had begun with Berlioz's scherzo-like Overture to Beatrice and Benedict, virtually his last work, yet, like the old Verdi, fuller than ever of sparkling wit. So was the performance.

The two Mozart works in the second half demonstrated that a fastidious conductor along with a 19th century-sized orchestra able to play with such perfect ensemble and warm lustre, achieves what others do with their scrupulous, "authentic" forces - and more.

Some will no doubt complain that there was too much opulence and romantic phrasing in the Divertimento. But it would surprise me if even the most radical authenticist could find fault with the performance of the Jupiter Symphony, one of the great masterpieces in which Mozart steps beyond his own age - both back to the masterly fugal skills of Bach and forward to the energy of Beethoven.

The concert was the happiest conjunction of talents, in wonderfully illustrative music.