



Australian
Monday 27/4/2009
Page: 30
Section: Arts & Entertainment
Region: Australia Circulation: 137,000
Type: National
Size: 145.46 sq.cms.
Published: MTWTF

Brief: TQO

Operatic feel to sacred score

CLASSICAL

Verdi's Requiem

The Queensland Orchestra. Conductor: Johannes Fritsch. Concert Hall, Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Southbank, Brisbane. April 24.

“VERDI’S latest opera in ecclesiastical robes.” These were the words conductor-composer Hans von Bulow used to dismiss this work. Opinion was divided. Brahms said “only a genius could have created this” and Wagner declined to comment. The *Requiem*, shot through with melodrama and feeling, was a tribute to poet Alessandro Manzoni.

Verdi’s mercurial music hurls fistfuls of terror in the fuming *Dies Irae* and the combined Brisbane Chorale and the Adelaide Symphony Chorus projected this, dramatically, moving seamlessly from hyperbole to still, hushed passages.

Verdi revisits these melting passages in the conclusive *Libera me* and the soprano Rosamund Illing must be credited for exquisitely conveying the anguished, whispered lines in the arioso that concludes the performance. In general, her contributions were ultra musical and controlled, although at times she was heckled by a pushy orchestra.

The recent refurbishment of the concert hall, with swanky furnishings, fresh colours and revamped acoustics complemented Illing’s detailing and the *Requiem*’s beautifully realised tender opening bars.

How to reconcile theatricality with the religious text is a key consideration for interpretation. Conductor Johannes Fritsch’s approach leaned towards high drama, and the quartet of soloists sounded evenly split between highlighting the liturgical and the secular. Rosario la Spina’s golden-toned solos were charismatic but operatic. Mezzo-soprano Milijana Nikolic was consistent, surveying her extensive role with ease, creating cool supple lines and a serious intention that were at odds with La Spina. Harry Peeters, the bass baritone, was business-like but lacked warmth.

Quick draw entries and deep involvement marked the outpourings of the massed voices. This was inspiring, as a much richer, satisfying choral presence was achieved than has been heard in this hall for many years. All registers from the upper to the lower reaches were evenly covered, rounded in tone and rhythmically on the money, even if articulation of the text needed clarity.

This was an enjoyable, sell-out occasion and the spirit of the performance was exhilarating. Still, it had unrealised potential as the cohesion required with such a vast musical army warranted more extensive rehearsal.

The woodwind accompaniment intermingling with the soprano and mezzo-soprano’s duo lines in *Agnus Dei* smacked of routine. And in the *Sanctus*’s powerful double fugue, the brass, possibly not yet accustomed to the hall’s lively acoustics, over-powered the moment.

Gillian Wills