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Shanty tale has power and passion

Miracle in Brisbane
Brisbane Festival
Composer Giorgio Battistelli
Director Rhoda Roberts

MIRACLE in Brisbane tells the story of homeless indigenous people building a shantytown on Brisbane's outskirts who discover oil on the site and then learn to adapt their own beliefs and lores within a changing world.

The basic narrative is set around a mother's love for her child – Ruby is touchingly played by the wonderful Deborah Mailman – and is underpinned by the connection of the fictitious Alawayabinna people to country and the land. This is perhaps

the strongest message from the piece and it is told through a combination of music, dance and ceremony.

The talented artists brought together for this ambitious work include local indigenous director Rhoda Roberts, the Canticum Choir and the Queensland Orchestra, together with a predominantly indigenous cast led by Song Man Djakapurra Munyarryun from the Dhalinbuy people, who was splendid in his pivotal role.

The opening incantation and dance ceremony that celebrates Ruby's wedding to Angelo, through the various episodes of their lives, was tightly directed by Rhoda Roberts producing some evocative images, the removal of

the child being paramount. Stephen Curtis's set design with a steep side rake and a storm drain worked well.

Italian composer Giorgio Battistelli's challenging score was well played by the small group of Queensland Orchestra players, conducted with precision and clarity by Luca Pfaff.

The orchestral music forms the voice of the piece, with limited dialogue that emphasises the "voiceless" protest of the indigenous people.

Overall, this was an interesting and thought-provoking evening though the episodic narrative failed to produce a satisfactory cohesive whole, possibly due to under-rehearsal.

Suzannah Conway