



# Contemporary works ignite new passion

**MUSIC**  
 20/21  
 Queensland Symphony  
 Orchestra, Brisbane  
 Powerhouse, February 5.



**Elena Kats-Chernin**

THE Queensland Symphony Orchestra has introduced a new series of three concerts this year called 20/21 that aims to introduce audiences to contemporary Australian composition and to influential or evocative works from the past century.

In the first concert, conductor Benjamin Northey's intelligent, commanding and encouraging leadership was invaluable. It's not often that conductor, ensemble and soloist — in this case Dutch

violinist Rudolf Koelman — are so well matched. In Leonard Bernstein's *Serenade*, Koelman contributed an inspirational, heartfelt and persuasive voice.

The dialogue between violinist and QSO's strings and percussion was snappy and the ensemble sparkled as an instrument of biting, invigorating precision.

If the Bernstein is an orchestral

contemplation of love inspired by Plato's *Symposium*, then *Recollecting ASTORoids*, by QSO's composer-in-residence Elena Kats-Chernin, is a smouldering, slinky affirmation of the tango as personified by Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla. Here it is spiced with Kats-Chernin's cheekiness and sense of fun.

Standards could soar even higher if only the clarinets, and especially the flutes, could exercise more pizzazz and muscle.

Even so, this concert hit the spot because of the adventurous programming, which included a convincing performance of Richard Meale's Suite from his opera *Voss* and the perky rapport between Northey and the instrumental forces.

The frequent opportunities in

the Meale and Bernstein works for rank and file to shine added interest, and the funky venue — at Brisbane's Powerhouse — gave the performers and jam-packed audience an easy intimacy.

QSO artistic director Richard Wenn says 20/21 has been initiated because the orchestra must help introduce audiences to new music, champion Australian composers such as Brett Dean, Meale and Kats-Chernin, and promote such international luminaries as US composer John Adams.

Future 20/21 audiences who hear, for example, Kats-Chernin's *Village Idiot* (in which the composer also performs) and the concerto *Selenite City* will discover that 21st-century pieces can be tuneful, exciting and well written.

**GILLIAN WILLS**