

Mahler's Dark Night of the Soul
Maestro Concert 5
Queensland Symphony Orchestra
Conductor Johannes Fritzsich
Violin Natalia Lomeiko
Viola Yuri Zhislin
Concert Hall, QPAC

Reviewer: Suzannah Conway

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The Queensland Symphony Orchestra is performing three of Mahler's nine symphonies this year to celebrate the centenary of the composer's death. The recent fifth symphony under Conductor Laureate, Muhai Tang, was sublime. A less popular and more troubled work, the ambitious *Symphony No.6 in A minor*, known as the Tragic, is particularly demanding for conductor and orchestra alike.

This proved to be a wonderful night. Inspired by Chief Conductor, Johannes Fritzsich, the orchestra demonstrated complete confidence and commitment in their collective and solo playing. The Maestro's interpretation brought intelligence and understanding to this colossal work, while the composition's layered textures and crossover themes were expertly managed across the many changes of mood and tempi.

Played with tremendous strength by an enlarged orchestra of 110 players, including 60 strings, the sombre opening notes of the first movement were chilling. Led by flutes and violins, Alma's melody soared over the brooding percussive marching theme with powerful musical depth.

Wisely offering the *Andante* before the *Scherzo*, the brutal intensity of the symphony gained some respite in this quieter movement. Fine work by horns, woodwind, harps and high strings added a sad poignancy, evocative of the alpine scenery Mahler loved.

The unrelenting repetitive percussive rhythms of the *Scherzo* dissolved seamlessly into well-paced lyrical dance sections with precise pizzicato strings. The difficult narrative of the final movement was masterful in delivery, the three powerful crescendos finally disintegrating into a cacophony of sound followed by tentative and carefully placed trombones and horns that faded away to an eerie silence. It was riveting.

The fourth symphony will be eagerly awaited later this year.

Mozart's delightful *Sinfonia Concertante in E flat*, a masterpiece of crossover form between symphony and concerto, was just the antidote to counterbalance Mahler. Fritzsich commenced with a crisp lightness allowing the orchestral strings, supplemented by perfect oboes and horns, to be a key voice alongside the soloists.

Husband and wife duo, violinist Natalia Lomeiko and violist Yuri Zhislin, reprising their success from 2010, gave technically flawless performances that were joyous in interpretation and perfectly harmonious.

The fast-paced *Allegro* and *Presto* movements offered violin and viola solos that chased each other in a constant playful dialogue with the orchestra. The central *Andante* movement, with its delicate languor, allowed Zhislin to colour his warm and richly-toned instrument perfectly, while Lomeiko's violin soared beautifully across the stave. The two separate Mozart cadenzas were virtuosic.