

LIMELIGHT

Music, Arts & Culture

Review

Greatest Mozart I & II, Mozart Recomposed (Canberra International Music Festival)

Three Mozart concerts at the Canberra International Music Festival create curiosity and intrigue.

The Fitters' Workshop, Canberra
Reviewed on 1 May, 2021
by [Clinton White](#) on 10 May, 2021
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Greatest Mozart 1, 1 May
Greatest Mozart 2, 3 May
Mozart Recomposed, 8 May

Even though Mozart was the headliner in these three concerts, there were quite a few 'support acts', though most were no less 'great' than the master. And in the third concert, Mozart was there by name only, except for a few quotes.



Peres Da Costa in *Greatest Mozart I* at the Canberra International Music Festival. Photo © Peter Hislop

Opening the first 'Greatest Mozart' concert was Mozart's Flute Quartet in D Major KV285. Here, Sally Walker, playing a gorgeously toned classical flute, was accompanied by Rachael Beesley on violin, Simon Oswell on viola and Daniel Yeadon on cello. Beesley is concertmaster of the Australian Romantic & Classical Orchestra, while the other three are section principals.

The entire performance was charming. The outer movements were well-paced, bright and clear, with the *Adagio* featuring beautifully measured pizzicati from the strings in support of the flute. Walker's fast runs in the third movement were even and smooth, adding a delightful lightness.

Mozart wrote 41 symphonies. Or did he? It seems his Third Symphony is not actually his work but his copy (for study) of a work by the German composer, Carl Friedrich Abel, only taking out the oboe parts and replacing them with clarinets – the precocious eight-year-old! It was the Mozart instrumentation heard in this concert.

Neal Peres Da Costa led the Australian Romantic & Classical Orchestra from a fortepiano. There was a nice, spirited start to the performance. But, across the work overall, the double bass and two cellos dominated, resulting in some imbalance. In the final movement, the horns lacked assuredness.

The final work was Mozart's Piano Concerto in A Major No 23, KV488, with Peres Da Costa as soloist, directing the orchestra from the fortepiano. Here the balance was much better and Peres Da Costa put something of a romantic interpretation into the work, especially in his rather attractive first movement cadenza and in his free interpretations in the *Adagio*.



van Bruggen in *Greatest Mozart II* at Canberra International Music Festival. Photo © Peter Hislop

Greatest Mozart II featured two works, beginning with Mozart's Clarinet Quintet in A, KV478. Nicole van Bruggen played a beautifully seductive, mellifluous basset clarinet, supported by Rachael Beesley and Anna McMichael on violins, with Simon Oswell on viola and Daniel Yeadon on cello.

This performance was the highlight of these two concerts. Once again, the Romantic period influenced the interpretation, which made the *Larghetto* tempo a tad slow. But the famous fourth movement, *Allegretto con variazioni*, was as light, charming and engaging as only Mozart's music can be, when it is played as well as did this ensemble.

Then it was the Piano Quartet in G Minor KV478, with Peres Da Costa at the fortepiano, supported by Beesley, Oswell and Yeadon. The festival booklet included a fascinating article by Peres Da Costa that discusses Mozart's style and notation, particularly the use of arpeggiation on the piano, most notably used by Carl Reinecke the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Reinecke was, notes Peres Da Costa, "one of the most important authorities on Mozart performance" and it was hoped his piano rolls would inform future generations.

Peres Da Costa included arpeggiation in this performance. That, in combination with, once again, a somewhat Romantic period interpretation added a different dimension to the piece. However, its use in the *Andante* movement, whilst creating a lovely warmth to the music, made it more an amble than a walk, and a little ponderous as a result. So, it becomes a matter of taste as to whether this is successful or not.



Da Silva Chen in *Mozart Recomposed* at the Canberra International Music Festival. Photo © Peter Hislop

In *Mozart Recomposed* the only connection to Mozart was the Australian composer, Gordon Hamilton's *Requiem Recomposed*. First, though, there was the special treat of some solo and duo violin work from Anna Da Silva Chen and Kristian Winther.

Da Silva Chen played Paganini's Caprices Nos 4 and 16 from Opus 1, while Winther played No 2, along with Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst's *Grand Caprice on Schubert's Der Erlkönig* Op. 26. Then the two played Halvorsen's *Passacaglia after G.F. Handel Suite No. 7* (with Winther on viola).

And herein lies tales that twist and turn as to which composer did what to which composer. Suffice to say that Paganini composed devilish violin pieces so he could show off his super talent. Then Ernst moved in next door so he could hear Paganini composing and practising. His dastardly plan was to match Paganini's skill in both, which he did, and they became rivals.

Then, of course, there's the twist of Ernst turning Schubert's work into a Caprice, not to mention Halvorsen having a go at Handel's *Suite No 7*, written almost two hundred years before Halvorsen put his pen to paper.

Da Silva Chen and Winther wowed the crowd with their virtuosity in playing these works. All five are 'devilish' to play, what with their double and triple stopping everywhere, not to mention trills amidst the multi-stopping, and impossible intervals in rapid succession. These two young artists acquitted themselves with flair, style and assuredness.

It was interesting, too, to hear the two approaches. Da Silva Chen had a firm touch, while Winther's was lighter, but both achieved great clarity.



Hamilton's *Mozart Recomposed* at the Canberra International Music Festival. Photo © Peter Hislop

Then it was on to the Hamilton/Mozart *Requiem*. Is it a conundrum? There are a few quotes from the Mozart original, but they merely embellish what already is a brilliant work by Hamilton that traverses the field from traditional choral harmonies to filmic scoring and even some scattered atonal work and electronic elements. There are also some fundamental differences in the structure between the two works, and Hamilton discarded the soloists, reduced the orchestra size and added some 21st-century technology. So, really, it is a question of whether Hamilton's is a "recomposition" or is he hiding his light under a bush?

On stage for this performance was Amber Evans conducting The Australian Voices, Luminescence Chamber Singers, and the Festival Ensemble (including festival director, Roland Peelman at the piano and electronic keyboard).

This was a performance of breathtaking quality, expressiveness, and tone. Evans' superb control of the on-stage forces delivered power and drama, gentleness and reverence, superb balance, and perfection in pitches and entries.

There was cleverness in Peelman's programming of these three concerts in the Canberra International Music Festival. Not only did they connect strongly to the festival's theme of *...the idea of Vienna*, they created curiosity and intrigue, they were interesting and engaging in their varied offerings, as well as in their connections and disconnections. More importantly, they made for plain simple enjoyable concert-going.