

...the program.

The space is state-of-the-art. Like its much loved and not entirely

troubled to trigger-nappy sound and lighting cues, it was clear the audience's dedication and loyalty had

projection from actors, he sometimes struggles to convince that Richard is actually a 28-year-old

Yalin Ozucelik is offering friend Jeff role of the doctor C

PERTH FESTIVAL

Reminder of universal, personal balm of hope, Odyssey

MUSIC

Gavin Bryars

Composer in Residence, Perth International Arts Festival. St Georges Cathedral, February 20. Dvorak *Stabat Mater*. Perth Concert Hall, 21 February

GIVEN the hectic pace required to take advantage of all that the present Perth festival has to offer, it was a treat to have arrived at last Friday's Gavin Bryars concert in a frenetic state of mind and to re-emerge less than two hours later in a state of calm and introspection. Unhurried, reflective and grounded in simplicity, Bryars's music is clearly meant to touch the lives and feelings of his audience.

Friday's program of four orchestral works spanned 30 years of Bryars's career from the relatively recent violin concerto *The Bulls of Bashan* (2000) to the famous, yet still provocative, *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* (1971). The consistency of compositional style evident throughout the evening indicated a commitment to ideas and ideals, not least to exploring the nature of musical slowness.

The decision to set the concert in St Georges Cathedral — a building for reflection, faith and collective thinking — was inspired. The acoustic qualities of the stage area, however, had a tendency to trap the sound instead of allowing it to travel throughout the structure. Mostly, this was frustrating, but at times it also provided a shield against some decidedly bad tuning.

Opening the concert with *The Porazzi Fragment* (1999), 21 solo strings from the West Australian Symphony Orchestra exploited the warmth of sound created by Bryars's textures to provide moments of transcendent beauty. But far more frequently the upper strings and celli struggled with intonation at the entry points of new phrases and homophonic textures. Given the high standards the WASO has set the past year, this was an unwelcome surprise.

Strange, too, was the apparent lack of communication between conductor Roger Smalley and soloist Daniel Kossov during the violin concerto. Kossov, exercising the restrained virtuosity required for the lyricism of this subdued work, seemed strangely unable to engage a usually alert Smalley, who is a

formidable musician renowned for his insights into contemporary performance. In a spoken introduction to his hallmark classic, *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet*, Bryars told the capacity audience of the dignity of an elderly tramp who had demonstrated his simple faith by spontaneously singing a song during the filming of a 1971 documentary.

Bryars looped the first 13 bars of the man's song into constant repetition, and reinforced it with a gently evolving orchestration which becomes more poignant and powerful. Bryars seems to be reminding us that in the face of hardship or tragedy music can provide the balm of hope: deeply personal and yet universal.

It was, of course, through music that Dvorak chose to express the grief of losing three children to illness between 1875 and 1877, setting a medieval sequence of Mary's grief for her crucified son in one of his most moving works.

Under the guidance of Graham Abbott, the assembled forces of the Prague Chamber Orchestra, reinforced by members of the WASO, four magnificent soloists, and the highly disciplined Australian Interservice Choral Festival Choir presented a finely measured performance of Dvorak's *Stabat Mater* that, judging from the five curtain calls demanded by the audience, could well become a festival highlight. From the outset, Abbott instilled the score with dignity and intensity, skilfully controlling the tempi and musical structures until the final ecstatic entry into paradise.

Where Bryars allowed room for personal reflection, Dvorak provided the blueprint to guide both performers and audience through a pilgrimage of suffering. Passionate from his first utterance, tenor Aldo di Toro immersed himself in the text, bringing an operatic intensity to his lines that was beautifully matched by his colleagues. Mezzo Fiona Campbell's rich sound was infinitely compassionate and, when in duet with soprano Lisa Harper-Brown's magnificently controlled singing, provided passages of infinite beauty. Equally exquisite was the female chorus entry of *Sancta Mater*, a movement that showed the impeccable tuning and preparation of the chorus. The only downfall was a lack of the colour differentiation and true vocal support that is vital to allow the chorus's sound to travel above orchestra and highly trained soloists.

Richard John



Cautionary tale: History repeats in *Live Act*



Solo journey: Yang in *Thirteen Hundred A*