

The Prague Chamber Orchestra was augmented by Perth musicians for a passionate account of Dvorak's Stabat Mater.

Hobo-inspired masterpiece

Concerts

Gavin Bryars

St George's Cathedral

Stabat Mater

Concert Hall

Review: Neville Cohn

GAVIN BRYARS is a burly, shaven-headed figure who might be mistaken for a night club bouncer. But the music that pours from his pen is the antithesis of his appearance.

Most of his music offered at St George's Cathedral was couched in hushed terms, music of mainly gentle, very gradually evolving ideas which, on paper, might seem a sure recipe for tedium. Instead, in a way difficult to define, it engages the attention totally.

In a positive sense, Bryars is a musical opportunist. He can see creative potential in what others might dismiss as trash. This is exemplified by his extraordinary musical treatment of a line from the hymn Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet.

A strip of recording tape, destined for the bin but retained by Bryars, on which the frail, quavery voice of an elderly hobo (now dead) is captured singing the opening lines of the hymn, became creative gold for the composer.

His idea was to record the brief vocal extract again and again on a continuous reel of tape, adding his own simple orchestral accompaniment.

This goes on for nearly half an hour but on this occasion took considerably longer because it was held up by technical difficulties that took a long time to clear up.

It was worth the wait because the experience, presided over by Bryars himself, provided me with one of the most uplifting works I can recall in years. Had this profoundly moving utterance been the only work on offer, I'd have gone home well satisfied.

Even the maddening intrusion of traffic along St Georges Terrace could not spoil the experience.

Bryars was also double bass soloist in his *By the Vaar* which pits amplified double bass, much of it in the form of pizzicato, against a



Gavin Bryars

rather restrained orchestral backing.

This time, though, I felt that a little of it went a long way.

Far more rewarding was a performance by violinist Daniel Kossov of Bryars' *Violin Concerto*. This, too, is an extended essay in levels of quietness, music that is muted for much of the time and seeming to reach the ear as if through layers of fine gauze. It called water-colour images of mist-shrouded landscapes to mind.

In the concerto, Roger Smalley was a meticulously prepared conductor, taking his forces through an accompaniment which adapted beautifully to the nuances of the solo line.

The next night a full house at the Concert Hall heard Dvorak's *Stabat Mater* played by the visiting Prague Chamber Orchestra. Its ranks were strengthened by a number of Perth musicians (who made up the entire trombone section) with the Australian Intersarsity Choral Societies Association filling the organ stalls almost to overflowing.

If ever a work was distilled in the crucible of grief, it is this setting by a composer almost

overwhelmed by the loss of three of his young children. The opening orchestral measures sound, chillingly, like screams of pain.

One cannot too highly praise the choral singing of the well-trained ensemble.

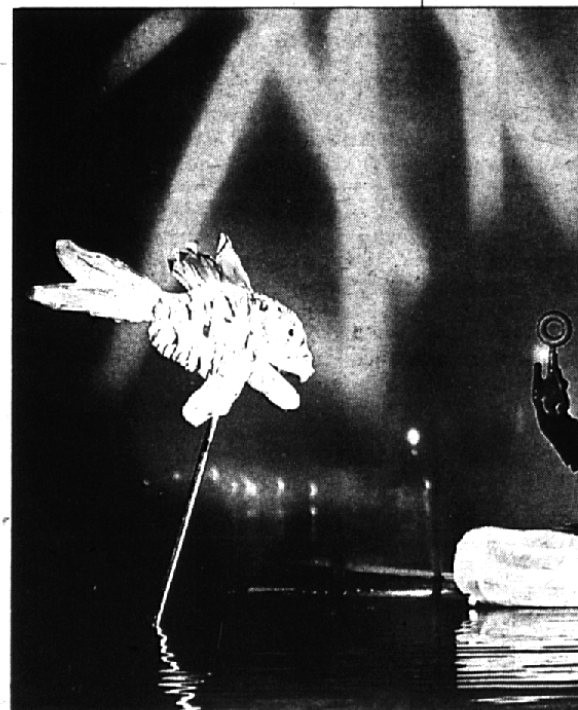
Aside from the occasionally tentative entries of bass Harry Peeters, the line-up of soloists could hardly be faulted.

Tenor Aldo di Toro has never sung better, and mezzo soprano Fiona Campbell was radiant both vocally and visually.

So, too, was soprano Lisa Harper-Brown whose fine voice ought to be far more frequently heard in her home town.

Graham Abbott's direction from the podium brought out the reverence and passion of this masterpiece.

Aside from some occasionally less than quite accurate pitching from the woodwind choir, the Prague visitors played Dvorak's marvellously probing score as if it belonged to them which, in a very special sense, it does.



Kathryn Puie manages puppetry as skilfully as the phy

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Review: Ron

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