

NZ Listener

September 10-16 2005 Vol 200 No 3409

The Taddei show

by Ian Dando

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Marc Taddei is to Christchurch what Sir William Glock was to the BBC Proms. His innovations this year alone surpass those of the Christchurch Symphony's entire history before he arrived as its music director four years ago. The orchestra's previous CEO had provocatively rubbished New Zealand music as "the kiss of death". How ironic, then, that 1500 people turned up to hear the quintet of new Kiwi works that made up the musical part of Timeless Land, an intermedia programme involving, as Taddei said, "interaction between our country's music and visual arts using new technologies of film, computer interaction, real-time manipulation of images and electro-acoustic music".

"Stravinsky's Rite of Spring in July was my beach-head programme," he added. "As the 20th century's icon of modernism, it was waiting to be picked off. But Timeless Land is my most innovative one."

Eve de Castro Robinson's Len Dances opens the concert vigorously with a heavily assertive, sometimes rowdy scoring not at all like her normal style of airy filigree decoration. Her busy writing, with many things happening at once, evokes Len Lye, who lived life to the full and loved his parties as per Castro Robinson's dance pastiche writing of charleston and rumba. Roger Horrocks's video screens a range of Lye's innovative art, and for one breathtaking minute at the end the orchestra ceases playing to let Wayne Laird's amplified sounds of Lye's kinetic sculptures speak for themselves.

Working with film-maker Rick Harvie, composer Harry Harrison is also Lye-inspired. His repetitive writing explores the relationship between Neil Dawson's spiralling sculpture "Chalice" in the Christchurch Square and its environment in a

four-movement jazz piece. Strong over-amplification coarsened impact. Harrison's *Insideout*, which boasts players like pianist Tom Rainey and trombonist Scott Taitoko, is a well-stacked jazz band.

David Downes is a self-sufficient intermedia man. His electronic writing with piano-dominated sonorities is slight, yet apposite to the aggression in his superior and more exploratory computer-generated visual imagery. In *Generation* a swinging light-bulb self-destructs, releasing the human figure inside. *Pylons* develop aggressive limbs, flaying the landscape. The bold strokes of Downes's elemental rhythmic energy are what make him popular with dance choreographers such as Michael Parmenter.

Chris Cree-Brown's sure evolution from studentish electronic fragments 12 or so years back via his first mature orchestral writing in works like *Icescape* of 2002 to his new *Celestial Bodies* is spectacular. Its 10 movements, comprising five orchestral, two electronic and three chamber with electronic, show the sure-footed maturity of a composer with one strong and clear personality in both electronic and orchestral writing. The visual input is from the camera of Julia Morrison, whose oil on water picture-taking interacts simultaneously with her impressions of the music.

I hope the impact of this strongest of all pieces wasn't diluted by audience exhaustion. A non-stop 75 minutes of what average concert-goers would perceive as solid modernism is force-feeding innovation and self-defeating. A second half of Anthony Ritchie's more digestible *Timeless Land* added up to a far-too-late 10.45pm finish. Limiting the first half to two works – say, the Cree-Brown and de Castro Robinson – would have been ideal.

The expansive Ritchie is well-proportioned between his music and visual projections of Grahame Sydney's mainly Maniototo-inspired paintings interspersed with Natural History images, with readings by Owen Marshall and Brian Turner from their book *Timeless Land*.

The music all goes on a bit long with one mood and tempo. Ritchie wrote it two years ago. This should put it on the cusp of his new liberated style as in his excellent 24 Piano Preludes, recently recorded on Atoll. Ritchie admits that most of the ideas in his thematically rich writing derive from the magic-square technique central to his new modernism. But the work is more a summing-up of his conservative past and echoes of Lilburn's landscape writing are all too pervasive. Its final minute, which is almost pure Lilburn down to the Scotch

snaps, is typical.

Taddei's message in this concert, presented in conjunction with the Christchurch Arts Festival, is to "celebrate the state of our arts without any cringe – that our artists are world-class". Christchurch could say the same of Taddei's bold programme. He has extended the city's musical taste to an adventurous point where backtracking to its conservative past is no longer an option.

TIMELESS LAND, Christchurch Town Hall.

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