



Violinist plays on emotions

MUSIC

The Queensland Orchestra

Johannes Fritzsich, conductor. Antje Weithass, violin. Queensland Performing Arts Centre Concert Hall, Brisbane, August 8.

BLENDING lyricism with atonal serialism, Berg's Violin Concerto of 1935 imaginatively interrogates the instrument's expressive capabilities. Snatches of a Bach chorale, the glimmer of a surreal waltz and a lively Carinthian folk tune emerge amid a daring orchestral language. It is dedicated "to the memory of an angel", referring to Manon Gropius, the daughter of Alma Mahler and Walter Gropius, who had died of polio.

The soloist in this performance with the Queensland Orchestra, German violinist Antje Weithass, inspired confidence from the moment she strode on to the stage.

Exuding compassion, tenderness and despair, Weithass used a brilliant spectrum of colour and her theatrical vibrato dug so deep into the strings, it seemed at times as if she could draw blood.

Occasionally her violin was raised towards the conductor as if posing a question, and the treacherous cadenzas were realised with ease.

A compelling performer, Weithass has the gravitas to lead the audience through Berg's harrowing musical journey.

The heart-melting concerto, with its Bach quotations and Brahmsian brushstrokes, inspired the inclusion in this program of Austro-German music of Bach's Suite No. 2 in B minor and Brahms's Symphony No. 4 in E minor.

In a satisfying concert, purposefully directed by Johannes Fritzsich, the Bach was graceful and sprightly, if on the tamer side of the ledger.

Principal flute Alexis Kenny, well able to meet the technical challenge, was nevertheless understated as a soloist. The work is distinctive because of the employment of a single flute voice in dialogue with string ensemble and Kenny's vital contribution was periodically lost.

Greater textural clarity was heard in the orchestra's showpiece symphony, the Brahms, in which TQO players achieved a lovely, full-blooded sound with a glossy sheen from the boosted strings.

The horn section glowed and the interplay between sections was well realised. Fritzsich effectively characterised each movement and moulded a dignified, overarching cohesion.

Gillian Wills