

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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A rare piece of Bach

Biset's orchestral suite *L'Arlesienne Suite No 2* arranged by his friend Ernest Guiraud.

The orchestra's performance was pleasing, especially the *Faradole* employing a well-known Christmas carol, and with a galloping momentum spurred along by the tambour.

The second half included a *Jolly Sleigh Ride* by Delius then soloist Jeremy Tatchell in duet with the choir in a warm, considered rendition of Williams's *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*.

Vivaldi's *Gloria in D* was the final item and here soloists Sarah Moose, Helen Thomson and Peter Campbell performed with skill and sweet tone in conjunction with SCUNA and the orchestra.

Then it was happily to supper and some carolling.

— MARGARET LEGGE-WILKINSON

anatics

the song *Plaisir d'Amour*. My intellect tells me that it is possible to read this as a kind of Pygmalion story with a dash of *The Collector* thrown in. My

ARARE musical opportunity presents itself tomorrow when the Llewellyn Choir with the Canberra Chamber Orchestra can be heard in a complete performance of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*.

Despite its title, this work is not an oratorio in the strict sense of the word. Unlike his notable predecessor Heinrich Schutz and his great contemporary Handel, Bach composed no oratorios.

This work is actually the six church cantatas which he wrote for the six feast days from Christmas Day to Epiphany, and they were first performed in sequence in St Thomas Church, Leipzig, from Christmas Day, 1734, to January 5, 1735.

They are, however, narrative cantatas, with the story told by the Evangelist, supported by four soloists, choir and orchestra.

After Bach's death, and with the later success, particularly in

W. L. HOFFMANN tells the history of Bach's 'Christmas Oratorio', to be heard in full tomorrow.

Britain, of the Handelian oratorio, the practice arose of performing these six seasonal cantatas together in one performance under the title of the *Christmas Oratorio*.

As the conductor of tomorrow's performance, Richard McIntyre, points out when I discuss its presentation with him, "It is a truly wonderful work, with some of Bach's most ravishing music.

"But because the six cantatas consist of almost three hours of music, a complete performance doesn't fit into the standard 20th century concert pattern.

"What is more often done is to present excerpts, leaving out the role of the Evangelist. However, this reduces the dramatic impact of the music.

"So I thought it would be rather nice to do the full work, even though this entailed dividing it into two parts and performing it at two concerts on the same day, with the first part in the afternoon and the second in the evening."

The performance of the first three cantatas will be on Saturday afternoon beginning at 3.30pm. After a dinner break, the final three cantatas will be presented at a second concert beginning at 7.30pm.

While the conductor realises that this will be quite a test for choristers and orchestra, his feeling is that "it will provide both performers and audience with a unique opportunity to participate in and to enjoy hearing a complete presentation of the *Christmas Oratorio*".

He adds, "While we are not attempting an 'authentic' recreation of this work, we are taking into account performance practice of Bach's time."

Over the past two decades Mc-

Intyre has made a considerable contribution to community music in Canberra.

As conductor of the Canberra Youth Orchestra for 10 years he brought it to a high musical standard.

Under his direction it made two highly acclaimed European concert tours in 1985 and 1990, during the latter achieving the notable success of being judged the finest ensemble at the International Youth Music Festival held in Vienna, and gaining the first prize against musical groups from around the world.

He has appeared as guest conductor with the Canberra Symphony Orchestra, and since 1993 has been musical director of the Llewellyn Choir.

This complete *Christmas Oratorio* is the latest in a series of notable and rarely heard choral works he has successfully introduced with this choir, including the Berlioz *Requiem*, Rachmaninov's *Vespers*, and earlier this year Janacek's *Glagolitic Mass*.

The soloists for tomorrow's presentation are all drawn from the School of Music's voice department.

They are soprano Sarah Shalders, mezzo Ilse Brown, tenor Tupe Tamyam and bass Terence den Dulk, with tenor Carl Cooper singing the Evangelist.

Daniel Mendelow, principal trumpet with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, will be heard in the extremely demanding *obligato* writing in this work for the piccolo trumpet.

There is a joyfulness to Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* that reflects the spirit of optimism and hope which surrounds the story of the Nativity, and Saturday's performance promises to provide something special in this year's musical celebration of Christmas in Canberra.

Christmas Oratorio will be in Llewellyn Hall. Tickets are available, with concessions, either for a single concert, or for the full work, at a reduced price for the two concerts. Bookings on 249 5491.

A new era for young singers

