

A melange of interesting notes and the promise of things to come

Ranting hyperbole and excruciating cacophony -
Musical World, October 28, 1841, describing the music of Chopin.

“Never was anything as incoherent, shrill, chaotic and ear-splitting produced in music. The most piercing dissonances clash in a really atrocious harmony, and a few puny ideas only increase the disagreeable and deafening effect.”

That’s how August von Kotzebue wrote of Beethoven’s *Fidelio* in 1806. If our next concert - *Modern Masterpieces* - raises any doubts in your mind, read on!

In 2007 Morten Lauridsen received the National Medal of Arts from the President in a White House ceremony, "for his composition of radiant choral works combining musical beauty, power and spiritual depth that have thrilled audiences worldwide."

Modern Masterpieces features two of his works - *O Magnum Mysterium* and *Dirait-On*.



Dirait-On forms part of a cycle *Les chansons de la rose* based on poems by German poet Rainer Maria Rilke.

It began as a brief commission for the Portland-based ensemble Choral Cross-Ties that Lauridsen learned about when his mother congratulated him on the upcoming premiere of a new piece - publicised in the group’s season announcement. He was quite surprised, as he had not received, let alone accepted, such a commission.

He took up the challenge. He had a habit of browsing through book stores searching for inspiration, where he discovered an edition of the complete French poems by Rilke. He composed *Dirait-On* in the style of a French folk song and submitted it as a piano-choral score - a stand-alone song that could be used as an encore piece.

Lauridsen discovered he was captivated by the exquisite fragrance of Rilke’s rose poems. He kept coming back, adding songs until he had crafted a complete cycle.

Music publishers J W Pepper describe it: “With velvet choral lines and a pensive mood, it is a deeply expressive musical statement for more accomplished choirs.” That sounds challenging!

Musical Director Christopher Allan says: “Mozart didn’t have all the tunes. In the last 30 years, many composers have returned to beautiful sounds with gentle dissonances and exquisite melodies. The music of *‘Modern Masterpieces’* will be delightful – we guarantee it ! “

This program features music that has an immediate appeal. Obviously that can’t be said of all modern music!



Critics like August von Kotzebue can be cruel, often scathing, just as history often embarrasses them. *Fidelio* is a much loved opera. As Samuel Butler observed, “The only things we really hate are unfamiliar things”.

George Tempelton Strong’s diary, written in the mid 19th century, was less than tolerant of music he found not to his traditional taste. He particularly disliked Wagner. The introduction to *Lohengrin* he dismissed as “two squeakinesses with a brassiness between them”. Wagner wrote like an “intoxified” pig; Berlioz like a tipsy chimpanzee.

The Boston *Gazette* described Liszt’s music as “a choice selection of the various shades of expression of which the voices of the nocturnal cat is capable”. Riegger's atonal work *Dichotomy* led a Berlin critic to write “It sounded as though a pack of rats were being slowly tormented to death, while, from time to time, a dying cow moaned”.

Such criticism is by no means limited to music. “Walt Whitman is as unacquainted with art as a hog with mathematics” wrote one critic. The New York *Tribune* commented on the poet’s *Leaves of Grass*: “The chief question... is whether anybody - even a poet - ought to take off his trousers in the market-place”.

Sometimes the artist strikes back. Composer Max Reger wrote to critic Rudolf Louis “I am sitting in the smallest room in my house. I have your review before me. In a moment it will be behind me”.

“The only way to judge art is to wait and see if it becomes evergreen. This takes a bit of time,” says tenor Andrea Bocelli. Some say it takes forty years for a musical work to become a masterpiece, and then only if it is of outstanding quality which stands the test of time.

Our *Modern Masterpieces* are of varying ages, but all are of great quality and immediate appeal which will certainly see them survive.

You can read our notes on the other works in this concert in Cacophony 44 - [click here](#).



Tickets available at MacLean’s Booksellers Hamilton, Music Solutions Warners Bay (cash only), online www.stickytickets.com.au/24900, or by phoning 4954 8781

Cacophony is edited by Peter McCloy on behalf of the Newcastle University Choir, who do not necessarily share the views of the editor. To contribute or to communicate, email us at newsletter@newcastleuniversitychoir.com
For more about Newcastle University Choir, go to www.newcastleuniversitychoir.com