

1-1-2012

## **Aural delight from start to finish**

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### **Recommended Citation**

Vance, David C.: Aural delight from start to finish 2012, 12.  
<https://ro.uow.edu.au/creartspapers/283>

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Date May 14, 2012

Reviewed by David Vance



Bach Eternal ... the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra. *Photo: Steven Godbee*

## **Australian Brandenburg Orchestra City Recital Hall, May 1**

ETERNAL BACH, the second program in this year's season of the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, celebrated not only the music of the composer for whom the orchestra is named but also the lasting vitality of the baroque style. It is very much alive when heard in performances such as this valuing historically informed playing to create untrammelled aural delight.

The artistic director and conductor, Paul Dyer, animated his forces with assured skill and understanding. There was vigour and passion in this performance just as there was great subtlety and finely shaded nuances of feeling and colour.

The first half was devoted to Bach in music that demonstrated the virtuosity of the performers as they negotiated their way through often demanding passages, none less so than the brilliant writing for organ, impressively accomplished by Heidi Jones in the sinfonia from Cantata 29, *Wir danken dir, Gott*.

In the *Orchestral Suite No.1 in C major*, the orchestra was at its best, revelling in the florid writing of the grandiose overture as well as the intricate cross rhythms and stylish melodic ornamentation of the dance movements that follow.

Joining the orchestra was the Brandenburg Choir, a superb ensemble faultless in diction, bringing contrapuntal clarity to the taxing melismas of the opening chorus of Cantata 110, *Unser Mund sei voll Lachens*, and tonal homogeneity to the elegantly simple chorale *Jesu*,

*bleibet meine Freude* (Jesu, joy of man's desiring). Soprano Belinda Montgomery, alto Tim Chung, tenor Eric Peterson and bass Simon Turnill were pleasing soloists.

The second half visited Bach's contemporaries. Little-known Bohemian composer Jan Zelenka was represented in a premiere performance of *Kyrie* from *Missa Sancti Josephi*, an imposing movement approaching a classical style, full of pomp but never pompous. Darryl Poulsen and Doree Dixon made Telemann's D major Concerto for two (natural) horns seem effortlessly exuberant, while Rachel Beesley's violin solo was as compelling as it was beautiful.

Two of Handel's Coronation Anthems, wonderfully performed, provided a fitting conclusion to a concert that had all the hallmarks of excellence from beginning to end.

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