

JOHN BUTTON - The Dominion Post I Monday, 24 November 2008

## Cellist provides icing an the cake

**This was a highly enjoyable concert, not demanding musically, but full of glorious sounds, delivered with playing of great richness and opulence by soloist and orchestra alike.**

There was the oddity of Kearing the two suites taken from Ravel's ballet *Daphnis and Chloe* divided — the first suite opened the concert, and the second suite finished it — and that did not really work.

So unfamiliar is the first suite to most listeners that its abrupt conclusion caught the audience by surprise, and it didn't make a lot of musical sense in isolation. Still, both suites were played with great opulence, and young conductor Alexander Shelley knew what he wanted.

The purely orchestral pieces in the concert — they were all French — were completed by Olivier Messiaen's first orchestral piece. *Les Offrandes Oubliees* (1930) is a short work with three contrasting sections. The first two are dynamic and incandescent, and lead into a string-dominated ending of great tranquility. It is a work of supreme Beauty, and Shelley drew from the orchestra playing of polish and tonal richness. But the heart of the concert was two famous pieces an Jewish themes. Swiss composer Ernest Bloch's *Schelomo* is a powerful, soulful, piece with sharp contrast between the prayerful, yet intense, solo cello, and the huge angular outbursts from the orchestra.

Bruch's *Kol Nidrei*, is not as intense, but with its use of melodies familiar to all Jews, it has become one of the most popular of all works composed for cello and orchestra.

Maria Kliegel is a superb cellist and a considerable musician. Playing her Carlo Tononi instrument, she makes a wonderful sound; rich and powerful yet capable of pianissimos of great surety. Her intonation is superb — absolutely rock steady — and her phrasing beautifully balanced. This is quite the finest cello playing we have heard for some time, contributing to a fitting finde to a year of mixed programming but excellent orchestral playing.