

Concert Review: Auckland Choral, Auckland Town Hall

By [William Dart](#)

5:30 AM Tuesday May 24, 2011

Leonie Holmes' *The Journey* headed the programme when Manukau Symphony Orchestra took the town hall stage on Sunday, as well as giving the concert its title.

The work's journey can be tracked from the opening te reo of its blessing, delivered by an assured Charene Clark, to the evocative poetry of Tessa Stephens which fuels the bulk of the score. Images of the tui tuning his song to the chant of Hoturoa and the returning sonorities of gull-murmur pass through the composer's sweeping melodic arches. Best of all, *The Journey* was sympathetically conceived for the singers of The Music Association of Auckland and for the orchestral players, who gave a committed performance under conductor Uwe Grodd.



Photo / Supplied

Robin Toan's *Concertino*, another MSO commission, has also been cleverly written to cater to orchestral strengths. There was an attractive mix between a quartet of spruce woodwind soloists (Melody Lin, Joy Liu, Julia Cornfield and Philip Sumner) and the players around them. Splashes of percussion with sprightly lines darting every which way revealed Toan's expertise with an orchestral canvas.

After interval, the massed voices of Auckland Choral give us Faure's *Cantique de Jean Racine* with some passion, against the finely judged organ contribution of John Wells.

The composer's *Requiem* followed. Some might not have warmed to this score being given such a grand treatment, although the bonus of a full-scale setting was a thrilling *Dies Irae*.

Grodd's paces were careful and the choir more impressive as a whole body than when tenors or sopranos ventured out on their own – the sopranos' *Sanctus* certainly lacked the suppleness that this essentially French music needs.

Contrapuntal singing in the *Offertoire* was strong and confident, enclosing the first of David Griffiths' consummate solos.

Emma Roxburgh in the *Pie Jesu* has sung better, occasionally revealing some vocal tightness in key phrases.

Once again, throughout the entire work, one was struck by John Wells' scrupulous musicianship and sensitivity to colour. His rippling, liquid-toned organ obbligato in the final *Paradisium* made one feel one was already in that blessed state.

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