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Page 1 of 1

REVIEW

Mahler's Dark Night of the Soul

Maestro Concert 5
Queensland Symphony Orchestra
Conductor Johannes Fritzsich
Concert Hall, QPAC
Reviewer: Suzannah Conway
Reviewed: June 4

THE Queensland Symphony Orchestra is performing three of Gustav Mahler's nine symphonies this year to celebrate the centenary of the composer's death.

The recent fifth symphony under Conductor Laureate Muhai Tang was sublime. A less popular and more troubled work, the ambitious *Symphony No. 6 in A minor*, known as the Tragic, is particularly demanding for conductor and orchestra alike.

This proved to be a wonderful night.

Inspired by chief conductor Johannes Fritzsich, the orchestra demonstrated confidence and commitment in their collective and solo play-

ing. Played with tremendous strength by an enlarged orchestra of 110 players, including 60 strings, the sombre opening notes of the first movement were chilling. Led by flutes and violins, Alma's melody soared over the brooding percussive marching theme with powerful musical depth.

Wisely offering the andante before the scherzo, the brutal intensity of the symphony gained some respite in this quieter movement. Fine work by horns, woodwind, harps and high strings added a sad poignancy, evocative of the alpine scenery Mahler loved.

Mozart's delightful *Sinfonia Concertante in E flat*, a masterpiece of crossover form between symphony and concerto, was just the antidote to counterbalance Mahler.

Fritzsich started with a crisp lightness allowing the orchestral strings, supplemented by perfect oboes and horns, to be a key voice alongside the soloists.