

# weering review

*By Nicholas M Tolhurst.*

.... the Arcko Symphonic Ensemble .... at the Church of All Nations in Carlton. Director Timothy Phillips continues to present performances of Australian composers, especially works of the past 50 or so years that have only been given one hearing. I must disclose I am an active supporter of Arcko and for good reason, as I hope to demonstrate.

The concert on 21 February was entirely devoted to the works of Melbourne-based composer Brendan Colbert. A composer with decades of commissions behind him, Colbert spoke briefly to the audience and admitted his music has been described as 'difficult, demanding' and 'uncompromising'. His music is certainly a tough call for players and, surprisingly, not too hard on audiences (sometimes 'uncompromising' is code for 'hostile to audiences').

The opening work was ***Proxima*** for string quartet, played by the Silo Quartet, whose members are regulars in the Arcko string line up. The sound was relentless with a solid sense of conversation between each of the four players while they yet maintained determined, individual lines. For me, fine chamber music always has me feeling like I'm eavesdropping on a marvellous conversation between the players. To experience chamber music played live is to add a dimension of physical engagement as you observe the players work together, The Silo Quartet worked hard, delivering a flawless, unified sound over the complex inner lines.

<http://weeringreview.com/2015/03/03/music-review-two-concerts-two-temples/>

The same intense and dedicated musicianship was given to us by all the succeeding players on the night. Phoebe Green gave a remarkably poised performance of Colbert's *Torque* for solo viola. Torque means twist and the piece was a tour de force of quite contrapuntal measures of virtuosic playing around a *cantus firmus* diminished chord, slowly relayed in and out of the piece.

The hero work of the night was a new work, commissioned by Arcko from Colbert *Like a Maelstrom*. And like a maelstrom it was. Inspired by the poet Emily Dickinson Colbert wrought an extraordinarily difficult concerto for trumpet (Bruno Siketa) and piano (Peter Dumsday) swirling amid fierce playing from 15 string players and two percussionists.

'Difficult, demanding and uncompromising' was the order of the day. There were moments when I watched Dumsday sweating over the waves of giant clusters he had to manage on the keyboard and I wondered if Colbert was just getting noisy (a not infrequent charge against younger contemporary composers) but then, out of the almost inchoate sounds, a direction always emerged, leading the piano and trumpet in and out of the body of sound. It was a hot night, the players could not have given more and the audience was clear at the end that no more needed to be demanded of them.

This was a concert of international standard and I wish I didn't have to sound so parochial in saying that, but then Arcko always delivers.