

Youths conquer choral Everest

CONCERT

WA Youth Orchestra

Perth Concert Hall

REVIEW NEVILLE COHN

It is no small challenge for any orchestra to mount a performance of Beethoven's Choral Symphony. Its difficulties are legendary, so I wondered how an ensemble consisting mainly of teenagers would cope with this vast and taxing symphonic Everest.

I am happy to say that, under the constantly supportive guidance of conductor Tze Law Chan — and, I dare say, a very exacting rehearsal regimen — the WA Youth Orchestra players came through with honour largely intact. True, the performance was not unflawed — a stumble here, precision compromised there, an occasional, brief weakening of concentration. But these were fleeting lapses. Overwhelmingly, WAYO came up to expectations with each section of the orchestra clearly on its musical toes.

There was disciplined attack and incisive rhythmic underpinning in the first movement. And the second movement, in turn dramatic and jovial, was a fine contrast to the hushed introspection of the following adagio. Here, in a presentation of most commendable musicianship, momentum was maintained at a very slow pace.

Lavish bouquets must also go to Collegium Symphonic Chorus and UWA Choral Society. With precise, admirably co-ordinated entries and impeccable internal tonal balance, the choristers did the music proud.

Vocal soloists were much on their mettle, too. Elisa Wilson coped admirably with the notoriously demanding soprano part and Joshua Bloom sang the bass part with confidence and carrying power. Mezzo Nicole Youl and tenor James Egglestone also came up trumps.

There was also a premiere: *Apricity*, a new work by Rebecca Erin Smith. A program note explains that *apricity* means the sun's warmth on a cold winter's day. Bright-toned utterances, primarily from the brass section, were well to the fore. And while this young composer is yet to evolve an idiosyncratic creative style, the work has a good deal going for it.

Clearly, Smith already has a fine feel for what works in orchestral terms. A charm-laden, gentle episode incorporates a wistful, triple-time contribution from the piano.

It's a marked contrast to the more robust sections which flank it. But one needn't know anything about the work's visual inspiration to respond in a positive way to the piece; it is no less accessible and meaningful as an essay in pure music. **1**