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[Sydney Philharmonia Choirs: A dazzling Easter dip into Bach and Mozart](#)

Sydney Morning Herald

BACH AND MOZART – Sydney Philharmonia Choirs: Capella St Crucis, Hannover Opera House Concert Hall, April 20

★★★★

Keats once remarked that poetry could only be understood through the senses and illustrated this using the metaphor that one dives into a lake not to reach the shore but to luxuriate in the water. With four choirs at the front, back and side galleries of the Opera House Concert Hall in addition to that on the main stage, Antony Pitts' new work *XLX Mente cordis sui* created a comparable immersive experience in polyphonic vocal sound.



Sydney Philharmonia Choirs bring the sounds of Bach and Mozart to the Sydney Opera House. KEITH SAUNDERS

Vocal lines from all directions mingled, phrases were echoed in quick succession from left and right, front and back, and ideas would grow from one group to dominate all like the moment of a wave. Pitts' work takes as its starting point an eight bar passage from Bach's Magnificat in D, BWV243, with the words "the imagination of their hearts", teasing out Bach's harmonies with modernist slides and dissonances like a fraying memory, yet all the while maintaining a sense of wholeness.

The combined forces of the Sydney Philharmonia Chamber Singers, Symphony Chorus and the visiting Capella St Crucis from Hannover under conductor Brett Weymark confronted the considerable challenges of maintaining pitch, balance and tonal cohesion in such a large space with professional focus, to create an intriguing tapestry of engaging interest.

The Capella St. Crucis, the Chamber Singers, Sydney Philharmonia Orchestra and a strong quintet of soloists (Sara Macliver, Anna Dowsley, Nicholas Tolputt, Nicholas Jones and David Greco) under Weymark followed this with Bach's Magnificat itself, in a performance that mixed the exhilarating splendour of the opening chorus, rhetorical theatricality for the phrase that Pitts drew on, and finely nuanced solos.

After interval Capella St Crucis conductor, Florian Lohmann, took the baton for a performance by the combined choirs of Mozart's incomplete Mass in C minor, KV 427, which the composer allegedly wrote in thanksgiving for his marriage. Lacking both a Crucifixus and Resurrexit it might seem a strange choice for Easter but that did nothing to dampen audience enthusiasm.

Lohmann led with subtlety and stylistic finesse, drawing a magnificently rich choral sound and achieving balance in both the large scale and more intimate numbers. Highlights of the latter included the blend of golden brightness from Macliver, rich warmth from Dowsley and clean focus from Tolputt in the Quoniam and the superb blend of Macliver's voice with woodwind trio in the Et Incarnatus.