



From Bach to Beijing, with love from east

CLASSICAL

ARVO PART AND JS BACH

Australian Chamber Orchestra,
Estonian Philharmonic Chamber
Choir

★★★★★

City Recital Hall, February 2

A LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

Sydney Symphony Orchestra

★★★

Opera House Concert Hall, February 1

Reviewed by **PETER MCCALLUM**

The Australian Chamber Orchestra launched its 2019 season by pairing with the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir in a program interleaving the glorious contrapuntal richness of Bach's motets with the austere simplicity of Estonia's most well-known composer Arvo Part.

Bach's motets are all ostensibly written for double choir alone, but the survival of a set of instrumental parts by Bach for the second motet, *Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf*, BWV226, suggests the practice adopted in this performance of adding instruments to the vocal lines was also followed by Bach at least on occasion.

Standing on opposite sides of the stage with the ACO seated in between, the Estonian Philharmonic wove these immaculately intricate polyphonic fabrics with unmannered clarity and purity of line and tone to create a texture whose complexity hovered beyond one's capacity

grasp it all at once. In this respect Part's music is the opposite – pared back to phrases of unassuming simplicity which seem to say “it is sufficient to make this utterance and no more”.

Conductor and ACO artistic director Richard Tognetti led with an instrumentalist's perspective, maintaining tautness of tempo, articulation and phrasing.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra under conductor Elim Chan celebrated the Lunar New Year with music by four Chinese composers and two Russians.

After the bright rhythmic activity of the Overture to Li Huanzhi's *Spring Festival*, Chen Qigang's *Iris dévoilée* juxtaposed Chinese and Western instruments and the sliding brightness of Peking opera singer Meng Meng with the vibrato and warmth of two Western operatic voices Amelia Farrugia and Eva Kong to sketch nine whimsically subtle female character portraits.

The concert ended with two exuberant dance works in the folk idioms encouraged during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, *Dance of the Yao Tribe* by Liu Tieshan and Mao Yuan, and Huang