



From out of the fire and into romanticism

MUSIC

Australian Chamber Orchestra. Richard Tognetti, director and solo violin. ANU Llewellyn Hall, Canberra, November 5.

AT face value, the ACO's last touring program for this year looks like an odd grab-bag of goodies. In performance it reveals Richard Tognetti's nearly unerring ability to draw together strands that connect and enlighten each other.

Through Barbara Blackman, that patron saint of new music (Tognetti's description), the ACO has commissioned a second new work from the Estonian composer, Erkki-Sven Tuur.

Flamma is a 17-minute series of pictorial evocations of the role of fire in our environment and psyche. Like some of our leading painters, Tuur's exhilarating music expands and contracts, settles and flares up again. He also refers obliquely to indigenous culture, particularly its chants, which tumble down an octave and re-new themselves.

Yet for all its pictorial connotations, *Flamma* is a series of conjoined ideas about musical pro-



JAMES CROUCHER

Artistic director Richard Tognetti rehearses with the ACO

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cesses. Tuur ignites ideas that roar into ferocious intensity, fuelled by driving rhythms and stabbing chords, yielding desolate horizons of harmonics.

A Baltic composer can barely imagine the alarm of the citizens of Australia's towns and cities when fire sweeps down on them.

Tuur paints a vivid, at times

terrifying picture of a force that can purify and destroy.

Quite accidentally, he has managed to do what few Australian composers have done: tapped into the psyche of those of us who face a long, hot summer.

At the other end of the emotional spectrum, the ACO drew its audience back into the safe haven of 19th-century romanticism. Henryk Wieniawski's Violin Concerto No2 is one of its confections, heard one moment, forgotten the next. At times it is good to be reminded about what

we need to forget. Nonetheless, Tognetti drained what he could from its froth and bubble, indulging himself in sheer delight.

A pity that joy did not always spread down the ranks, where there were some dubious intonation moments, perhaps due to the ACO attuning itself to 19th-century pitch (down to A-430) and the deployment of pairs of period winds and brass.

Over the years, Tognetti has fired up ACO audiences with his ruminations on Beethoven. Some people are adoring adherents, others harbour doubts. Tognetti's version of the *Pastoral* symphony highlighted every element of its inherent pictorialism. Variations in tempi and dynamics suggested a colourised version of a black-and-white movie, offering more than a dash of Disney.

Of all Beethoven's symphonies, the *Pastoral* is able to withstand even the most wayward of curatorial restorations. Next year the ACO offer us the choral Ninth. Is there a boxed set in the wings?

VINCENT PLUSH

Also Melbourne Town Hall tonight; Perth Concert Hall Wednesday; Sydney Opera House November 13; Sydney City Recital Hall November 15, 16 and 19 and QPAC Brisbane November 18.