

A symphony of splendour

CONCERT

UWA Symphony Orchestra

Winthrop Hall

REVIEW NEVILLE COHN

Three days short of the 100th anniversary of the first performance in Paris of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, Christopher van Tuinen took a near-100-strong orchestra through an often blazingly intense account of a work that triggered riots at its long-ago Paris premiere.

There weren't any disturbances at Sunday's performance. Rather, the capacity audience listened in silence bordering on reverence. It was a splendid idea to mount this centenary performance as part of UWA's own centennial celebrations.

This is not to suggest the performance was flawless. It wasn't. There were some lapses in intonation and occasional lack of definition — but these blips did little to detract from the overarching intensity and drive of the playing.

Throughout, grainy-toned strings and flaring brass underscored the barbaric

intensity of much of the writing. This was a gratifyingly committed reading.

There was more splendour after interval in an account — too rare, by far — of Rachmaninov's *The Bells* based on Edgar Allan Poe's famous poem of the same name.

Here, the combined forces of UWA Choral Society and UWA Symphonic Chorus gave their best. And although occasionally, diction was not as clear as one might have hoped, corporate tone and fine projection compensated in large measure.

Of the three vocal soloists, I especially liked the performance of baritone Thomas Friberg who sang his words with very real understanding of their dark undercurrent — and projected his voice most effectively.

Tenor Jun Zhang, too, brought to his words great intensity of feeling in a vocal line that, for the most part, effortlessly rode the crest of the accompanying orchestral wave. There was, as well, a most pleasing solo from soprano Toni Johnson.

An all-Russian compilation opened with Mussorgsky's ever popular *Night on Bald Mountain*, with the players seeming to relish getting to noisy grips with the composer's dramatic notion of satanic revelry. **1**