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Concert Review: La Clemenza di Tito at Town Hall Concert Chamber

By [William Dart](#)

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On Sunday, the combined talent, resources and faith of Auckland Opera Studio and Auckland Chamber Orchestra enabled music-lovers to experience Mozart's final operatic venture, *La Clemenza di Tito*.

Cast in the extremely formalised mold of opera seria, this tale of an all-forgiving Roman Emperor was ideal for the occasion that had seen the work commissioned in 1791 – the coronation of Leopold II as Emperor of Bohemia.



Kristen Darragh. Photo / Norrie Montgomery

There were no ceremonial extravagances in the Town Hall's concert chamber. With a minimal but effective stage setting, Raymond Hawthorne's directorial hand ensured that the production sustained a remarkable momentum.

All recitatives, apart from those with full accompaniment, had been replaced by Hawthorne's own impeccably delivered narration, acted out, in mime, by the characters in question. The youngish cast responded with style and imagination to Mozart's considerable demands.

Madeleine Pierard's Vitellia, the villainess of the piece, came up with an inexhaustible catalogue of expressions of rage and contrition during Hawthorne's running commentaries. And, from her first aria, *Deh, se piacer*, she flourished the coloratura we had been expecting.

A hint of darker mezzo gave Pierard's voice an individuality that worked well in her final *Non piu di fiori*, singing alongside Andrew Uren's lilting basset horn obbligato.

Kristen Darragh, in a trouser role, brought the manipulated Sesto to life, particularly in the dramatic pointing and easy musicianship of her recitative.

There were similar strengths to be heard with Andrew Glover's likeable Tito. The anguish of signing his friend's death warrant in the recitative, *No, cosi scellerato*, touched the heart in a way that opera seria does not always achieve.

Amelia Berry delivered a confidently sung *Annio* while Marlena Devoe's *Servilia* was the epitome of dulcet-toned grace.

James Ioelu, as *Publio*, achieved an almost Verdian thrust in his *Tardi s'avvede*.

This was very much an ensemble production, overseen by the able Peter Scholes with an Auckland Chamber Orchestra whose strings, it must be admitted, were occasionally a touch smudgy.

Nevertheless, the players lent solid and reliable support as a succession of riveting ensemble pieces, including a breathtaking Act One Finale, recreated the power games and politics of Ancient Rome.

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