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ADELAIDE YOUTH ORCHESTRAS

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Reviewed by Ewart Shaw, Sunday 15th June 2014

Chutzpah is a Yiddish word that translates approximately as cheek, or daring, or foolhardiness. In 1890 [Gustav Mahler](#) premiered his *Symphony No. 1* known as *The Titan*, using as many musicians as he could possibly wrangle onto a stage. The joint forces of the Elder Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra and the Adelaide Youth Orchestra combined for the Elder Hall [Titan](#) performances on the extended platform numbered 114. Choosing the work may have been an act of bravado on behalf of the conductor Keith Crellin, but his risks were carefully calculated and the performance was a great success by any measure.

From the first Budapest performance until the final version, performed here, published in 1896, the score underwent many changes, but the main outlines and structure remain as he first heard them in his composer's imagination.

Keith Crellin's years of experience with young musicians, especially his two orchestras, led him to carefully judged changes of tempo, communicated clearly, and watching him in rehearsal, it was easy to see how he clarified many of Mahler's complexities

The work blends some of Mahler's early orchestral songs with a kaleidoscope of emotions, moods and harmonies, orchestral textures, grand rhetorical gestures and moments of great tenderness. If you know his *Songs of the Wayfarer*, *Lieder eines Fahrenden Gesellen*, you'll recognize two of the songs as they appear, carrying with them a remembered sense of the words but not actually representing the songs themselves. You'll certainly recognize *Frere Jacques*, recast in a minor key and given to the double basses as a funeral march, surreal and disturbing. Mahler later wrote a set of songs about dead children.

The string tone might not have been as burnished as a professional orchestra but seventy two strings have an impressive heft, fine if not entirely unblemished wood winds, excellent brass on stage and briefly off stage and energetic percussion all came together splendidly.

In all a striking performance of a difficult work, with special mention to the eight French horns, and the percussionist who got to play the triangle in the grand finale, but throughout the lengthy work, the concentration and commitment was outstanding. An old friend of mine had already bought tickets for the upcoming Melbourne Symphony Orchestra performance of *The Titan* but Adelaide music lovers can count themselves well served with this collaboration of two fine young ensembles.

In an interview on Radio Adelaide Crellin considered the fact that the level of orchestral training available in a conservatoria was much higher than could be counted on in even Mahler's day, and that became clear in the first half of the concert, when after the Overture by Schubert, generally known as *Rosamunde*, Samantha Webber turned in a sparkling performance of the concertino for clarinet and orchestra by Weber, whose unfinished opera *Die Drei Pintos* *The Three Pintos* had been completed by Mahler just months before he began work on the 1st symphony.

There were two performances on the Saturday evening and the Sunday afternoon. I attended the second, but I met several people in Adelaide on Saturday night who had come from the first performance and were enthusiastic about the event.