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## Lane takes audience on smooth, stylish ride

Maestro Mid-Winter Gala. Christchurch Symphony Orchestra, conductor Tom Woods with Piers Lane (piano). Town Hall, June 20.  
Reviewed by Patrick Shepherd. - The Press | Saturday, 21 June 2008

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**To help mark the celebrations of the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra's 50th year, Prime Minister Helen Clark introduced the programme from the stage while the orchestra's founder, Professor John Ritchie, watched from the audience. The pieces on show were of a calibre suitable for such an auspicious occasion, with favourites from the repertoire, a homegrown work and the welcome return of pianist Piers Lane.**

Lane's technical assurance and suave musicianship shone through in Chopin's E minor Concerto, a work with plenty of event for the soloist but few thrills for the orchestra. The solo part drives every aspect of the work once the perfunctory orchestral introduction is over and with Lane in the driver's seat the ride was smooth and stylish, perhaps even a tad effortless at times. Lane's mastery of Chopin's dazzling trademark arabesques was flawless.

The improvisational elegance of the second movement was well captured and the bassoon solo was nicely judged. Both soloist and orchestra judged the angularity and impact of the folk-based rhythms of the finale well, contrasting these motifs with the more reflective passages and darker sonorities. Again Lane shifted gear effortlessly in the connection of Chopin's ideas, and Tom Wood's direction achieved absolute cohesion between him and the orchestra.

In the second half, Martin Lodge's Aer was an atmospheric appetiser for the heavyweight Brahms to follow and, while it presented several very attractive textures with the orchestra broken up into its component parts, the idea needed more time to develop fully and the result fell short of satisfying.

I found the opening Wagner's Meistersingers very reserved, with the usually full upper string sound somewhat depleted; the same went for the first movement of Brahms's Second Symphony. The second movement would have benefited from more urgent direction in places but the whole really picked up for an expansive and airy third movement, with a neat contrast in the rhythmically incisive strings, and the exuberance of the finale.

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