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Magical listening

CONCERT

New London Consort
Perth Concert Hall
Review: Neville Cohn

Johann Sebastian Bach and his two wives were fertile, industrious people who produced no fewer than 20 children. Bach was no less fruitful as a composer, churning out vast amounts of music, much of which survives to this day. But his genius was seldom fully acknowledged in his lifetime.

Two of Bach's Easter-centric works have survived and although not as uniformly inspired or as perfectly proportioned as, say, his setting of The Passion According to St John, it contains musical gold. The duet between Hope and Fear early in the Easter Cantata glowed with authority and glittered with fine detail. Here was a good musical marriage between vocal splendour and stylistic integrity. Counter-tenor Christopher Robson's

high-register vocal flutings as Fear were imbued with an eeriness that brought an added frisson to the listening experience. So, too, did tenor Andrew King as Hope.

Finesse of this order compensated for some lacklustre moments such as the Evangelist's Song of Thanks which sounded ponderous, earthbound and tentative. But the opening chorus — Rejoice you Hearts — was informed by a perfectly gauged mood of jubilation.

A highlight of the Easter Oratorio was the opening Sinfonia, an all-instrumental, spring-heeled offering made memorable by silvery-toned trumpet fanfares and first-rate work on the kettle drums. Joseph Cornwell's account of The Pain of My Death was an impressive offering accompanied by flawlessly integrated, gently lulling playing by two recorders.

Throughout the oratorio, an eight-strong chorus scaled the heights. Penelope Spencer's often lengthy violin obbligatos were expressive in the best sense. And cellist Catherine Finnis' discreet continuo playing was magical as was David Rabiou's contribution at the chamber organ.

This program was recorded by ABC Classic FM for broadcast tomorrow at 8pm.