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Right with Spring and masterful with Mozart

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MUSIC REVIEW: IGNAT SOLZHENITSYN and the ANAM ORCHESTRA
Australian National Academy of Music, South Melbourne Town Hall, March 25

US-BASED pianist and conductor Ignat Solzhenitsyn, a visiting artist at the National Academy, supervised and got right into the middle of one of the body's major concerts. Saturday evening featured the near-mandatory Mozart before a welcome airing of the Schumann Symphony No. 1, the Spring.

Of Schumann's four, this symphony gets least live exposure, much less than the last two. Solzhenitsyn displayed an engaging empathy with the work, having no need here, or anywhere, for a score and enthusiastically inviting his charges to enter into the score's ebullience. To their credit, the ANAM musicians collaborated fully, few defects coming to the surface.

The conductor, who is in his early 30s, has a fluid, unfussy approach, giving the ANAM brass a certain degree of leeway, particularly the horn quartet against the hall's back wall, which often enunciated fractionally late. Both brass and wind for this concert made a considerable impact because of light

string numbers; 12 violins, four each in alto and tenor registers, and two basses all had to push hard against the resonant opposition.

For the Mozart first half, Solzhenitsyn conducted the overture to La Clemenza di Tito with plenty of dash, although some of the string figuration could be seen but not heard. He then directed from the piano an engrossing performance of the Concerto No. 25 in C Major that, although not in the same quirky mould, brought back pleasurable memories of Robert Levin's interpretation of the work here and in the Olympic city in 2000.

Solzhenitsyn underlined his merits as both performer and educator through a refreshing freedom from blurred passage work, an athletic bounce to the rondo finale and giving full vent to the concerto's expansive self-elaboration in the magnificent opening movement, a high point of Mozart's piano productions, here negotiated with detailed care and masterful honesty.