

## **KBB Music Festival 2021, Symphony Orchestra Category**

Adjudication Summary from Nicola Baker and Ben Hoadley:

Thank-you for your invitation to be your adjudicators for the KBB Band and Orchestra Festival, 2021. We thoroughly enjoyed the time at Holy Trinity hearing all of the groups. It was an honour to be part of this hugely impressive event, which I think we all appreciate even more after missing it in 2020. Now, writing this from Level 4 lockdown a week later, all we can say is that the timing was perfect and that the memory of hearing and seeing you all performing live is extra special and is keeping our spirits up. The fact that you all returned after the year absence with renewed vigour and commitment, with some truly inspirational performances, gives us great hope for the future of symphonic music. May we always cherish performing live and the personal interactions and rich experiences that being part of an orchestra give us.

Firstly and most importantly, to conductors and tutors, congratulations! Each of you have each done a superlative job assembling and preparing these groups. We are fully aware of the limited time and opportunities for rehearsal time, with schedule clashes, and competition from sport and a seemingly ever increasing array of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that teachers, pupils and their families have to juggle. Not all of the groups we heard were equal, there were some younger orchestras to whom performing at the Festival might be a significant achievement. To some, a bronze medal is a huge step whereas to others, a disappointment. We acknowledge the pressure from some school managements to produce medals. It is impossible for an adjudicator to know what the journey of an orchestra might have been, and this is appropriate if we to do our job impartially. We consider only what we hear on the day, and mark using the very detailed rubric that we were given. This rubric has resulted in some quite low scores for some groups so please don't be discouraged if your group was in this category. The rubric creates a wide spread and, say, a mark of 45 is absolutely not a "fail" where it would be in an exam.

We listened to a number of very good performances, and some exceptional ones. Some excellent and memorable performances ones were not limited to the gold and silver medal winning groups. However the groups that scored higher had the most consistency in their programmes. Some groups gave us a gold medal performance in one piece and then well below in the next. We had to take this consistency into account.

An important issue that we want to highlight is appropriate choice of repertoire in style, level, and instrumentation. While we have a duty to provide the highest quality of repertoire possible for our group, this must be at a level where the players can play it comfortably and without struggling, and where possible without too many missing parts or substitutions. There were a few groups with some outstanding individual players but then other players noticeably having difficulty keeping up. While we would chose to programme the original version of a work where possible, if an abridged a version (such as the excellent arrangements of Egmont Overture and

Firebird that we heard) suits the group much better, this provides a more enjoyable listening experience, and comfortable experience for most of the players. Orchestras are a collaborative affair, and consistency throughout the sections was important criteria in our marking. We of course took into account that it is impossible for any school group to have a consistent level of playing in each section, but some groups managed to negotiate this more smoothly than others.

We were listening out for and impressed by musical aspects of ensemble playing such as sensitivity to balance across the orchestra, and unity within larger sections such as brass, woodwind and strings. We found it particularly impressive that in so many of the orchestras we heard there was already so much evidence of maturity in these aspects. Although individual playing ability is of course very important it is these challenges about playing well together in large groups that is integral to what a symphony orchestra is trying to do.

We were encouraged with the wide range of styles presented, but were disappointed that only a few groups played a piece from the classical period. While Beethoven's Egmont Overture rides the fence between classical and romantic, we made the call that its style and historical context places it in the latter. While the winner of the award for best classical piece was most well-deserved (we could have chosen not to award it at all if there was not a high enough standard), we would have liked more choice. The classical era saw the first flowering of the modern symphony orchestra. In the more broader term, "classical music" is the genre that defines the symphony orchestra from a concert band or jazz band, so the orchestra is a great way to expose pupils to this style.

It was very pleasing to hear the number of groups using vocalists and choir, and some very fine soloists. The competition for the Other Style Award, NZ Award, Soloist Award and Chairperson's Command Award was fierce. We would like to mention a few individual items, other than those that won these prizes, that we found particularly inspiring: an awesome trombonist from MAGS absolutely nailing Czardas; the flute player from Sacred Heart College who arose from the orchestra to sing the most spine-tingling solo in Lord of the Rings; also from Sacred Heart College, student composer Chris Valenzuela's excellent composition that the orchestra played with panache; Auckland Grammar School Orchestra for perhaps the most audacious programming of the Festival, that the players seemed to love performing; and a deeply moving performance of "The Prayer" from Avondale College Orchestra with soloists Delores and Dominic that was our nomination for the Chairperson's Command Award.

Last but certainly not least, huge thanks and congratulations to the organisation team, this huge event so impressively run, with every detail so finely attended to. We feel so proud to be involved with the KBB Festival, which we are just so fortunate to have in Auckland. As previously mentioned, we must never take the opportunity for live music for granted. And having missed it in 2020, and coming so close to that again this year, we all value the Festival more than ever. May it continue to flourish!