

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

American tone for enjoyable musical delights

By W. L. Hoffmann

Canberra Symphony Orchestra directed by James Sedares. Llewellyn Hall, Oct 3-4.

IT WAS an all-American program that the Canberra Symphony Orchestra presented for the third concert of its 2001 subscription series in Llewellyn Hall last week, and it was very fitting that both conductor and soloist on this occasion were US-born.

Conductor James Sedares, a native

of Chicago, brought a confident direction to the four diverse works on the program, drawing playing that was both spirited and expressive from the members of the orchestra. The concert opened to the brilliant sound of brass and percussion in Aaron Copland's short but resounding *Fanfare for the Common Man*.

This was an apt introduction to the *Concerto for Timpani and Orchestra* which followed, a work that was as unusual as it was diverting. Written in 1983 by Los Angeles percussionist and composer, William Kraft, the per-

formance introduced as soloist Gary France from Syracuse, New York State, who is currently head of percussion and brass at the Canberra School of Music as well as principal percussionist with the CSO.

It is a skilfully written three-movement work which makes high demands on the soloist who leads the musical discourse on his six drums, matching the supporting contributions of a large orchestra with its own percussion section. Gary France provided a brilliantly assured performance, with the visual aspects of his playing quite

rivetting as he displayed the wide range of rhythmic and tonal possibilities of the timpani which the composer exploits in the course of the concerto.

In direct contrast to the musical pyrotechnics of this concerto, conductor and orchestra turned their attention to the quieter expression and poetic nuances of Copland's suite from his ballet music *Appalachian Spring*. This made a pleasing interlude before the distinctively different expressive mood of the final work of the program, George Gershwin's tone poem *An*

American in Paris with its picturesque scoring and jaunty rhythms. It received a suitably vital performance, perhaps a little too lively at times, particularly in its final stages. Here the effectiveness of the return of the central lyrical theme was somewhat marred when the string body was constantly swamped by an over-enthusiastic brass section.

However, it certainly made a bright if somewhat noisy conclusion to a concert of varied and enjoyable musical delights.