

Youthful start to show of courage

By **MURRAY BLACK**

11 MINUTES AGO AUGUST 2, 2019 •  COMMENTS

I recently heard a couple of talks by American professor Brene Brown. She exhorts us to be brave, act with courage and, in the words of Theodore Roosevelt, to get out into the metaphorical arena.

It struck me that this is what musicians do every day. It takes a supreme act of courage to go on stage and perform in front of an audience. Those of us who assess their work would do well to - remember this — not to withhold judgment but so we can be thoughtful and respectful in making it.

On Tuesday, before AWO Six (the chamber music arm of the Australian World Orchestra) took the stage, four young musicians from the NSW Regional Orchestra joined cellist Peter Morrison to perform the third movement of Alexander Glazunov's Op 39 string quartet. While there were intonation lapses and a momentary halt after they lost their way, the group's commitment to achieve a coherent ensemble sound and unified interpretation shone through.

The usually emotionally reticent Johannes Brahms committed his own act of courage in writing his second string sextet. This cathartic work was inspired by deeply personal circumstances, namely the collapse of his engagement to the singer Agathe von Siebold.

Aside from the vigorous poco allegro finale, Brahms's sextet inhabits a twilight musical world - eschewing extremes of tempo, dynamics and mood. AWO Six cleverly established the right emotional temperature: heartfelt but not overwrought.

Maintaining good ensemble blend and balance, the group's luscious colours and sinuous phrasing realised Brahms's seemingly endless supply of exquisite melodies. Their textural clarity and well-defined lines illuminated its array of inner details. Shrewd tempo and dynamic changes generated periodic bursts of speed and surges of energy in the first three movements while their swift speeds and emphatic attack created an exciting account of the finale.

Mendelssohn wrote his second string quintet for his friend, Ferdinand David, concertmaster of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. The first violin is a dominant force for much of the work. Violinist

Natalie Chee's rich, crystalline solos appreciated her role's prominence without overshadowing her colleagues.

The AWO Six's brisk tempos, dynamic contrasts and rhythmic acuity captured the propulsive - energy and joyous thematic cut-and-thrust nature of the two outer movements. Their deft lightness of touch and lilting rhythms realised the charm of the second movement while curvaceous lines and expressive blend revealed the ruminative essence of the third.

AWO Six. City Recital Hall, Sydney. July 30.