

Mozart's birthday marked in style

A varied line-up of concerts featuring orchestras, solo singers, musicians and dancers at various Joburg venues offer fans of the acclaimed Austrian composer a treat

JENNY DE KLERK

If you are looking for a reason to celebrate, it's Mozart's birthday this week; well, actually it was on Monday

No matter, it's a good excuse for a party and the Johannesburg International Mozart Festival has taken up the challenge.

That's Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, by the way; a wild young man who lived tempestuously from 1756 to 1791 and composed prolifically, producing some of the most beautiful music ever heard.

Well, that's my opinion and it seems it is shared. The festival launched last weekend with a lively, well-attended opening concert that transported us back to the heyday of Vienna, where Mozart composed many of his best-known symphonies, concertos and operas.

With conductor Richard Cock on the podium, the Johannesburg Festival Orchestra launched into three-time for a Viennese celebration, including Strauss waltzes and lively arias from Frans Lehar's *The Merry Widow* performed by soprano Hlengiwe Mkhwanazi, who has not only a glorious voice, but considerable acting ability.

This year's Standard Bank Young Artist Award-winner for music, baritone Njabulo Madlala, tackled arias from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, while talented young ballroom dancers swept in to give us a taste of the elaborate Viennese balls of the time.

It was a varied, popular and accessible programme, which culminated, inevitably, in the well-known Strauss waltz *The Blue Danube*, performed by the



Dancers from Joburg Ballet and the Johannesburg Festival Orchestra at the Opening Concert of the Johannesburg International Mozart Festival.

orchestra and three graceful couples from the Joburg Ballet.

The theme for this year's festival is *Un'aura amorosa*, which translates as *Love's Delights and Dilemmas*.

There have been song recitals, a choral concert and organ recitals at various venues this week.

Tonight acclaimed pianist Anton Nel, formerly from Joburg and now based in the US, is giving a recital at the Linder Auditorium at

8pm, playing works by Mozart, Debussy and Beethoven.

Tomorrow, anyone who can play an instrument from a grade 3 level, and always yearned to play in an orchestra, will get the chance in Orchestra From Scratch at the Wits Education Campus. It should be fun.

On Tuesday, Anton Nel is the soloist with the Johannesburg Festival Orchestra conducted by Richard Cock for a full symphony

concert at the Linder. They are playing – you guessed it – a selection of Mozart's music, including two piano concertos, the overture from *The Marriage of Figaro* and the *Haffner* symphony.

On Wednesday and Thursday there are chamber music concerts at Northwards House; a chamber orchestra concert with the Buskaid Soweto String Ensemble at The Edge at St Mary's School in Waverley on Friday; and a



Dancer Tanja (Tanima) Schmid is performing at the Choreography Concert next Saturday with cellist Erich Oskar Huetter.

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The final concert with soloist Florian Uhlig on piano and members of the orchestra, is also at The Edge, on Sunday.

But the theme continues – there will be another celebration titled *Love is a Many Splendored Thing*, a Valentine's Day symphony concert on February 14 and 15, with Richard Cock and the Johannesburg Festival Orchestra, also at the Linder Auditorium.

● For more details on the *Johannesburg International Mozart Festival* see www.join-mozart-festival.org