

Celebrating Christmas without the syrup

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The Song Company, Australian Brandenburg Orchestra

City Recital Hall, December 17 and 19

THIS week, when soupy renditions of White Christmas and Jingle Bells reached plague proportions all over the city, there was only one safe haven. In Angel Place two ensembles offered Christmas concerts almost entirely free of cliches. Almost.

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Two days earlier, Angel Place was overrun by a menagerie of squawking, clucking, braying animals in A Free Range Christmas.

The six choristers of the Song Company delivered a slick and pacy show which swung from comedy to tragedy and tradition to pop culture with ease.

This is a group which is totally convincing, whether they are singing polyphony of the 13th century or Winnie the Pooh.

Highlights from a treasure trove: the traditional French carol *Entre le boeuf et l'ane gris*; the brilliantly delivered piece of whimsy that is the Wesley-Smith twins' *Lost Snail*; and my favourite, the irresistible *Riu riu chiu*.

But for true zaniness the prize goes to the pseudo-Rossinian Cat Duet arranged by the company's artistic director, Roland Peelman. I have never heard such tuneful caterwauling.

Nicole Thomson and Lanneke Wallace-Wells managed to channel their inner feline with whisker-fine accuracy, reducing the audience to howls of helpless laughter. Barking mad and brilliant.

This story was found at:
<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/12/20/1261243817006.html>