Ritual, Myth, and Mediation: Dharmoo and Strauss at the NAC

The National Arts Centre's pairing of Gabriel Dharmoo's *Wanmansho* with Richard Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* stages a compelling conversation across time about how music constructs identity and narrative. In *Wanmansho*, Dharmoo transforms the orchestra into a site of ritual and mythmaking, performing as both composer and soloist through voice, breathwork, gesture, and silence. The work invents a fully imagined cultural ceremony, blending satire, myth, and expressive theatricality. It interrogates the mediation of culture itself, foregrounding how performance and media shape perception and engagement, turning the audience into active participants in a constructed reality.

Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*, by contrast, deploys orchestral scale and rhetoric to monumentalize the heroic self. The NAC Orchestra captures every nuance of Strauss's narrative, from the intimate lyricism of the companion episode to the overwhelming force of battle and triumph. Where Strauss asserts identity through epic musical spectacle, Dharmoo experiments with multiplicity, hybridity, and performative mediation. Together, these works illuminate how orchestral media can construct, challenge, and transform notions of culture, heroism, and presence, revealing music as both narrative and immersive, a space where identity is performed, mediated, and refracted across generations.





The program was made all the more memorable under the direction of conductor Alexander Shelley, whose time as Music Director of the National Arts Centre Orchestra comes to an end this season. Shelley brought clarity and energy to both works, balancing the bold theatricality of Dharmoo's *Wanmansho* with the sweeping grandeur of Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*. His final performances with the NAC Orchestra make this concert a powerful close to his leadership, leaving a lasting legacy of innovation and artistry.

Source: https://www.idonthaveacoolname.com/straussdharmoonac/

Images used in this blog post



