



All the right moves:
Gideon Obarzanek
Picture: David
Geraghty

A flasher mob that dazzles the senses

REVIEW

THERE are 60 performers on stage in *Assembly*, yet, curiously, one person seems to be missing. It's not a dancer; there are six magnificent bodies writhing and crawling and leaping about the 6m-high staircased stage, their lithe limbs echoing the ebb and flow of the angelic voices of the choir. It's not a singer; the 50-strong members of the Victorian Opera and the Sydney Philharmonic Choir fill every crevice of the Angel Place City Recital Hall with choral crescendos that raise goosebumps. No, it's a conductor that I've been waiting to see appear from the darkened wings, something I only realise when the performers slither into their final formation. It's not like there are any slips or falls that immediately prompt the need for a master of ceremonies — the hour-long performance is flawless — it's more that the entire thing seems high impossible. The show's cast of thousands,

choreographed by Gideon Obarzanek and musically directed by Victorian Opera conductor Richard Gill, move as though they are one beast, an ever-hungry monster that spits people out one second and accepts them eagerly back into its fold the next. Like all crowds of substantial size, it gives the people ensconced within it the opportunity to lose their inhibitions, shed their skin

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and, for one brief moment, become just one of many. Watching the performers yell and scream and shout within the comfort of the crowd is unexpectedly therapeutic. At times the crowd disperses, the people within it breaking away to rediscover the identity they lost while in the belly of the beast.

While the choir lifts its voice to the heavens, the dancers slither and snake down the steps, sometimes stopping to shove each other meanly down the stairs. The precision of the movement is awe-inspiring, akin to watching chess pieces navigate the ever-changing terrain of a chequerboard. Groups and sub-groups emerge, their loyalties shifting every second. Witnessing their struggle to find a place within and outside of the crowd is unsettling and comforting all at the same time. It's a familiar fight. The other remarkable thing about the production is the diversity of the performers. Men, women, teenagers, old, young, plump, petite — it's a little like watching a highly choreographed flash mob without the cheesy songs. An ambitious project pulled off with rousing success. **Vanessa Keys**
Assembly, City Recital Hall, Angel Place, , \$80-\$89, sydneyfestival.org.au