

Spirit by the sea

By KEITH FIELD

ST MARY Star-of-the-Sea Church stands on Aboriginal meeting grounds in West Melbourne and its flamboyant interior still preserves a spirit of corroboree.

On Sunday, a large audience from many ethnic communities celebrated *The Brolgas are Dancing*, a concert by the Orana Chamber Orchestra.

With a strong core of professional players from Eastern Europe, the ensemble was idiomatic and polished in Bartok's *Rumanian Dances*, playing with spontaneous accenting and instinctive color.

Peter Mousaferiadis conducted clearly and Michelle Higgs was excellent, leading with firm violin tone and performing solo sections eloquently.

Her co-principal, Romana Geermans, was equally authentic in Vittorio Monti's popular *Czardas*, its slow gypsy-song delivered in dark, throbbing intensity, and sub-

REVIEW classics

The Brolgas are Dancing

Performers: Orana Chamber Orchestra, Peter Mousaferiadis artistic director, Michelle Higgs concert master, Romana Geermans violin

Where: St Mary Star-of-the-Sea Church, West Melbourne

When: May 5

sequent dance arousing brilliant speed and energy.

The strong individuality of Nikolaos Skalkottas was well represented by his settings for string orchestra of *Five Greek Dances*.

Rich in harmonic imagination and changes of texture, the items showed some strain and exposed technical weaknesses in the lower strings.

A *Dance Suite* by the Czech composer, Frantisek Domaz-

licky, included a tango, foxtrot, waltz and la carioca.

By now quite uninhibited, the players imitated hissing wire brushes and shouted and stamped at will.

Alex Barbakh was equally high-spirited in his *Fantasy for Accordion and String Orchestra*, using the slow *Hora* and fast *Serba*, both Moldovian folk dances, while the Melbourne composer, Matthew Fagan, patiently explored Spanish and Irish music in his *Celtic Suite*.

The Orana Chamber Orchestra is now in its second year, and Mousaferiadis is fortunate to have such able players at his disposal.

He must strive now for more consistent rehearsal to exploit their talents fully.

At the same time, he should continue to encourage younger composers to write innovative works which fully represent the extraordinary range of musical styles in Melbourne at the present time.

Strings of surprises to intrigue and perple

ORANA

St Mary Star of the Sea
5 May

U. SRINIVAS

Monash University
5 May

SUNDAY'S MUSICAL action featured a multicultural quinella: in the afternoon, the Orana Chamber Orchestra made up chiefly of expatriate European and Slavic musicians, and the evening, the Academy of Indian Music presented the mandolin maestro U. Srinivas.

The Orana group consisted of strings, and the program featured Bartok's well-known *Rumanian Dances* as well as a set of *Five Greek Dances* by the under-rated Schoenberg pupil, Skalkottas. One of the first violins, Romana Geermans, kept herself more than occupied with the solo line in Monti's enjoyable Hungarian/Gypsy cliché, *Czardas*, as well as fronting Melbourne guitarist Matthew Fagan's *Celtic Suite*.

The Orana's assistant conductor Alex Barbakh, gave us his own *Czardas* with a *Hora* and *Serba* for piano accordion and strings, played with much enthusiasm as Frantisek Domazlicky's *Suita Danza*. Both works broke no new ground but made for enjoyable light listening.

U. SRINIVAS has adapted the mandolin for use in Karnatic Indian music, getting rid of the usual pair of strings, then adding a fifth one to the original four. The result is surprising for its assimilation into what we think of as the Indian classic sound.

In performance, Srinivas appeared to truncate the usual elaboration of the raga — that elongated improvisation to no perceptible rhythm — so that the formalisation of a piece came from the pulse of the drum, the marvelously eloquent mridangam here played by Srimushnam V. Raja Rao, came to the fore.

The focus of the ensemble rested firmly on Srinivas, whose brother U. Rajesh, played an accompanying mandolin, with Delhi P. Sundarajan mirroring the two plucked instruments on violin. While there was no questioning the virtuosity of Srinivas, the evening's most affecting music came in quiet songs, ornamented melodies that encapsulated the mellismatic beauty of Indian composition and its inseparable twin — improvisation.

As always, you were left perplexed, astonished and elated by the complexity of patterns and flexibility of the ensemble that Indian musician