Many operas have nonsensical libretti. In The Crucible, though, every word counts in a story about the paranoia wrought by lying witnesses in the 1692 Salem witch trials which resulted in the mass hanging of innocent people. Arthur Miller’s play on which it was based was written as an allegory for McCarthyism and the communist scare in the 1950s.

In Ward’s opera, every word of Bernard Stambler’s libretto needs to be clearly heard but, on opening night, not all of them reached the ear as clearly as they should. But overall the sheer intensity of presentation did much to convey the religious mania of the time.

Leith Taylor’s skilled directorial touch was everywhere apparent — a gesture here, a glance there — the cumulative effect of which made for satisfying music theatre.

Sam Roberts-Smith was admirable in the pivotal role of John Proctor, with a strong stage presence and consistent clarity of enunciation. Deborah Rogers was convincing, too, as Proctor’s wife Elizabeth. Morgan Cowling breathed convincing life into the role of the Proctors’ maid Mary Warren.

Sarah Nairn, as the apparently bewitched Betty Parris who tries to fly out of the window, was altogether convincing. And skilled make-up, demeanour and a well-projected voice gave point and meaning to Leilah Fox’s portrayal of the doomed Rebecca Nurse. Caitlin Cassidy was in consistently mellow voice and dramatically convincing as the slave maid Tituba. Thomas Wood brought a most fitting sense of gravitas to his role as Judge Danforth.

Anna Gardiner’s set and Christopher Essoo’s lighting design gave a sense of place and time, an effect enhanced by Nikita Lewis’ costumes.

The Crucible ends on Friday. Justin Bischof performs improvisations in the style of Bach, Reger, Stravinsky and Messiaen at St George’s Cathedral tomorrow night.