

International journeying with Duo Col Legno

By Leon Gray

A fascinated audience were suitably intrigued when renowned marimbist, Yoshiko Tsuruta and cellist, Heleen du Plessis, as Duo Col Legno, teamed up to celebrate a sense of place on Sunday.

Presenting a programme of diverse international repertoire celebrating culture and identity, the pair offered an array of musical colours ranging from gently lyrical to passionately dramatic; demonstrating the satisfying synergy that naturally exists between these two instruments.

The pristine elegance of the Romantic era was captured in the duo's clever re-imaginings of Tchaikovsky's *Andante Cantabile* and Faure's *Après un Rêve*; merging the expected pathos and yearning with an understated freshness that felt both relaxed and contemporary. Du Plessis's warmth at the bow was especially commendable, complemented beautifully by perfectly subtle accompaniment from Tsuruta.

Performances of the meditative, yet opulent *Song of 'Almah* by Andrew Beall, and the duo's own arrangement of *Three Japanese Songs* offered the plaintive and elemental. With sensitive yet dynamic execution, the duo honoured the folk roots of the source material, exploited all the best parts of their individual instrumental expertise and demonstrated the expressive potency inherent in their combination; the last Japanese song hinting at the dizzying contemporary repertoire that was to follow under Tsuruta's hyper-charged mallets.

The thrill of edgy, athletic, passionate, wry, diverse and dramatic contemporary performance was very much the theme for the remainder of the programme with stunningly proficient renditions of Gareth Farr's *Tahu-nui-ā-Rangi*, Pärt's *Fratres*, Ourkouzounov's *Tonzologia* and Klatzow's *A Sense of Place*.

The exciting use of extended performance techniques, divergent harmonic landscapes, fragmentation and distortion of melody and pure energy placed these works squarely in the 21st century; the audience being treated to a living masterclass in the important disruption such repertoire offers and the inspiration felt when such repertoire is brought to life.

The unquestionable gifts of Tsuruta and du Plessis were evident throughout, not least in the passion with which they spoke about works with which they had especially meaningful connections. Despite demanding repertoire, not once did their energy sag; a metaphor for the seemingly endless energy exuding out of the international world of contemporary composition and arrangement.