

Concert Review  
Tauranga Musica  
8 April, 2019

Baritone: Julien Van Mellaerts  
Pianist: James Baillieu  
Venue: St. Peter's Anglican Church, Mount Maunganui

Tauranga concert-goers enjoyed an evening of Lied and other solo works in an evening with New Zealand baritone, Julien Van Mellaerts and accompanist, James Baillieu. A recent graduate of the Royal College of Music, Van Mellaerts has returned to New Zealand to tour his recital programme and brings with him as his accompanist, Baillieu, Professor of Piano Performance at the Royal College of Music, London.

Van Mellaerts began his programme with several selections by Schubert, the undisputed Father of Lied. In particular his interpretation of *Prometheus* (composed in 1819 and set to words by the great German poet, Goethe), displayed the young baritone's remarkable abilities towards characterization and drama.

The highlight of Van Mellaerts programme was Schumann's masterpiece, *Dichterliebe*, a 16-movement song cycle. A demanding work, the cycle requires both incredible emotional sensitivity and technical vocal control of its singer. Van Mellaerts achieved this admirably. In particular, his seemingly-effortless pianissimo passages hung beautifully in the air of St. Peter's. The baritone's performance was masterfully supported and made all the more enjoyable by Baillieu's deeply moving, inspired, and at times profound, interpretation of Schumann's complicated accompaniment.

The second half of the recital featured a song cycle inspired by native bird song, *Ornithological Anecdotes*, composed by New Zealand composer Gareth Farr and set to poems by Bill Manhire commissioned especially by Van Mellaerts's for his tour. The strength of this cycle lays largely with the clever and thought-provoking text of Manhire's. Van Mellaerts connected well with these songs and delivered them convincingly.

Britten's folk song arrangements are often over-performed in recital programmes. Every young singer learns them as part of their standard repertoire, but these two young performers are to be applauded for their wonderfully refreshing, deeply sensitive, and insightful interpretations of *Sally in Our Alley* and *O Waly Waly* in particular.

Van Mellaerts and Baillieu concluded their recital with an eclectic mix of songs by Sibelius, Schumann, Gershwin and Porter. Again, Van Mellaerts showed remarkable dramatic ability in Schumann's epic and exciting *Belsatzar*.

Tauranga Musica's next concert features local percussionist extraordinaire, Yoshiko Tsuruta on 26 May at 4:00pm at Tauranga Park Auditorium in Pyes Pa.