

Tauranga Musica Concert Review

Who: Anna and Angus Simmons
Where: Wesley Church, 13th Avenue
When: Friday 3rd July, 2020

Tauranga music-lovers were treated to a beautiful evening of songs and arias by duo Angus (baritone) and Anna (soprano) Simmons. Compliments of Tauranga Musica, Angus and Anna delivered an eclectic selection of solos and duets. Following the starvation of live music due to lockdown, their programme provided much food for the soul.

Christchurch-born Angus opened the concert with Poulenc's first attempt at a song cycle, *Le Bestiaire*. The young baritone captured as well as anyone could the quirkiness of this bizarre menagerie from goat to grasshopper to crayfish. He followed these with beautiful and sensitive interpretations of two of Schubert's most well-known Lieder. *Nacht und Träume* in particular was sung with considerable skill and thought to Schubert's phrase. For the second half of the concert, Simmons performed selections from Vaughn Williams' popular song cycle, *Songs of Travel*. An ideal choice for any young baritone beginning his career and setting out on musical adventures, Simmons sang these with fantastic energy, capturing perfectly the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the adventurer.

Tauranga-born Anna began her portion of the first half of the concert with 3 selections from Canteloube's luscious *Songs of the Auvergne*. One could be forgiven for dismissing these as mere "folk songs". They are not easy and pose a particular set of challenges for sopranos. Anna sang them with great skill and beauty which left the listener longing to hear her deliver the rest of them. The soprano then moved to two Lieder by Strauss and Wolf. Simmons delivered these with tremendous sensitivity and understanding even though the odd final consonants were over-emphasised for the German language. Simmons really shone in her delivery of Bernstein's whimsical song cycle *I Hate Music!* She conveyed masterfully the natural impetuousness and unabashed honesty of the child narrator.

Throughout the evening, The Simmons were accompanied by the incomparable David Kelly on the piano. No stranger to Tauranga audiences, David's talents are many. From the most demanding flourishes of Mozart to the most tricky rhythms of Bernstein, Kelly plays with superb energy, grace and sensitivity. He is always aware of not only style, but also perfectly in tune to what his singer requires. A first class accompanist and a brilliant fit for this husband and wife duo.

To conclude, the couple, as expected, performed a number of duets including the darling opening scene from Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* and a lesser-known duet from Thomas' French opera, *Hamlet*. The husband and wife duo sing well together. Theirs is a genuine chemistry which must make singing these romantic duets especially rewarding. If I had one complaint, it is perhaps that we were cheated from the opportunity to hear more of them singing together. But they, like their singing careers, are young so perhaps we might be treated to that in the future. It is worthwhile noting that this recital essentially marks the young couple's "farewell" to New Zealand while they prepare to take the next step in their musical journey and education. Angus and Anna are soon to depart for Dresden. We wish them *bon voyage* and *toi toi toi*. I hope they do not, as some New Zealand singers do, stay away too long. I would be eager for these two promising young singers to return to us soon. I anticipate hearing great things from them both in the future.

Chalium Poppy