

Brass blast through time and space at Baycourt

By Leon Gray

THE chilly air could do little to stop ACE Brass' heated journey around the world on Wednesday night at Baycourt.

Delighting the X-Space audience with brass baubles from diverse time periods, the efforts of horn player Emma Eden, trombonist John Gluyas, and trumpeter Huw Dann presented international repertoire with elegance, well-nuanced dynamics, and always-tight timing.

From within their audience, they opened their programme in call-and-response style with a canon by English Renaissance composer, Tallis, which instantly piqued audience interest and adding an enjoyable physical performance aspect. This blossomed into a contemporary fanfare by American, Cohen, which satisfactorily combined the three instruments' timbres.

A prelude and fugue by German romantic, Boehme, demonstrated flexibility, facility, and athleticism from each performer, highlighting how electrifying musical timing can be when executed with deft precision. This was further carried into two works by 20th century Argentinian, Piazzolla, showing off both the lyrical and the flamboyant sides of the trio.

New Zealand composer, Bowater, used the instruments to explore Polynesian folk stories, presenting a challenging contemporary work that utilised an array of less-traditional performance techniques. In vivid contrast, a work by Spanish composer, Ortiz, saw the trio swap to sackbut, tambourine, and ukulele, transporting the audience instantly to a world of fireside Renaissance minstrelsy.

A guest recorded appearance by trombonist's John's daughter, Lauren, guided the audience through a musical retelling of the Norwegian tale of the Three Billy Goats Gruff by Japanese contemporary composer, Kanazawa. Its playful and whimsical back-story belying the work's complex rhythms, harmony, and word-painting features, admirably executed by the trio.

In soothing contrast, a short piece by French composer, Thibault (inspired by Austrian, Mozart) presented a familiar neo-Classical, diatonic style, before trombonist John launched into a 20th Century electro-acoustic duet with a recording of an early synthesizer piece by Australian, Wesley-Smith. This gave him the opportunity to dazzle technically, whilst keeping in the strictest of time with an always-unforgiving recorded performance partner.

The trio combined for three final flourishes in the romantic and popular style, presenting charming arrangements of Puccini, Sherwin, and Arlen pieces as a fond farewell to an appreciative audience. A bonus mash-up of Pokarekare Ana and Waltzing Matilda saw the trio sign-off in pleasing style.