

Review – Tauranga Musica

Tauranga Connections Concert – March 21, 2021

Tauranga's 2021 chamber music season began with a splash on Sunday with Tauranga Musica's first concert of the new year. The afternoon's entertainment, appropriately entitled "Tauranga Connections" featured a quartet of musicians who all have connections to the local area. The ensemble consisted of resident musicians, Justus Rozemond (clarinet) and Yoshi Tsuruta (marimba) and visitors, Michael Jamieson (saxophone) and Andrzej Nowicki (clarinet). The quartet delivered a remarkable programme of eclectic and exciting works which must have certainly thrilled the appreciative audience gathered at the Tauranga Park Auditorium.

The concert began with an arrangement of 3 lesser-known piano *Preludes* of American 20th Century composer, George Gershwin, scored for saxophone and marimba by Tsuruta herself. While none of these *Preludes* really tested the technical skill of the duo, the dynamic range of both instruments was thoroughly exploited. Their seemingly-symbiotic balance and the combination of their unique blend filled every corner of the performance space with sumptuous perfection. Gershwin could never have envisaged these works being transcribed for this particular pairing of instruments, but how perfectly they captured the spirit of his jazzy aesthetic.

Jamieson and Tsuruta then followed this with the famous duet for saxophone and marimba by Yuyama, *Divertimento* – a curious title for this work, given *divertimento*, when translated means "an amusement". While the audience might have been amused, or perhaps more appropriately thrilled, it is doubtful the performers felt the same. Yuyama's work is a multifaceted and complex work. It is extraordinarily demanding and requires absolute focus and masterful skill. The duo were challenged every which way – dynamically and rhythmically – effectively resulting in a jaw-dropping delivery which was energetic, exciting and sensational to say the least.

To end the concert's first half, Rozemond and Nowicki took to the stage to deliver a rare musical treat; a performance of Mozart's *12 Duets for Bass Horns*. Rare, because bass horns (a favourite sound of Mozart's) are scarce in New Zealand. Special thanks must be made to FAME Trust for the loan of these valuable instruments to two such deserving players for this concert and for our listening satisfaction. The duets are relatively short, all charming, and full of Mozart's playfulness and supremacy over melody; running the gamut of 18th Century forms from the Polonaise to the Minuet and Trio. Rozemond and Nowicki captured succinctly the essence of the Mozart sound, which is not an easy feat for 2 instruments that are the same. Their measured skill and mastery really only on full display for the final electrifying Allegro.

To begin the second half Rozemond and Nowicki performed the famous *Sonata for 2 Clarinets* by French composer, Francis Poulenc. A work, that is in many regards ahead of its time, captures the chaotic disarray and uncertain future of war-torn Europe. In his introduction, Nowicki, himself described the work as "quirky". Both musicians encompassed all these characteristics and indeed found many more, from the pensive sadness of the second movement to the frenzied counterpart of the challenging third movement.

Following the Poulenc's Sonata, the duo then performed Nowicki's own 3-part Hommage (composed in 2019) as a response. Nowicki begins where Poulenc leaves off – it is a virtuosic work with really stretches the breadth and width of not only the instruments but also the instrumentalists.

Jamieson and Tsuruta returned to the stage to perform Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla's *Histoire du Tango* – another transcription of a work (originally composed for flute and guitar), but well-adapted for saxophone and marimba. Less tangos, and more tone poems, each of the 3 pieces paint a portrait and tell the story of the inextricable link between a culture and its dance. Latin through and through, Jamieson and Tsuruta radiated with the hot, steamy, and sultry passion of the intimate bygone Argentinian night life.

The quartet ended their concert with a performance of Nyman's iconic *In C Interlude*; a sort of improvisatory theme and variations which neatly showcased the talents and skills once more of this outstanding foursome in one final flourish.

What a promising start to the 2021 concert season. Thank you, Tauranga Musica for your continued dedication to bringing quality New Zealand talent and music to our community. It is with great anticipation that we are looking forward to welcoming the trio, ACE Brass to Tauranga in April.

Chalium Poppy,

22 March, 2021