

Concert Review – Tauranga Musica
L'horizon chimérique – Sunday, 20th March, 2022

After mandates of every sort and a revolving door of ever-changing restrictions on crowd size brought the music scene to the brink in 2021, Tauranga Musica rose from the ashes on Sunday afternoon to present their first concert of 2022. Husband and wife duo, Angus and Anna Simmons (baritone and soprano, respectively), along with flautist Luca Manghi and pianist, David Kelly presented L'horizon chimérique; a celebration of French impressionistic music.

Baritone, Angus Simmons, opened the afternoon with Gabriel Fauré's song cycle, *L'horizon chimérique*, a collection of four songs which invokes exciting images of the sea, a bustling port, scenes aboard ship, and fantasies of a sea-bound voyage. Famously, Fauré refused to write a work which celebrated the allied victory, instead, choosing to honour the talent of promising, young, French poet, Jean de la Ville, from the ranks of the fallen. Simmons, supported with the utmost sensitively by Kelly at the piano, conveyed much of the enthusiasm and innocence of youth inherent in these songs, but perhaps failed to find Fauré's more subtle undercurrent of sadness at a creative flame extinguished far too soon and a journey and adventure that will never be taken.

Joined by flautist, Luca Manghi, soprano, Anna, performed Maurice Emmanuel's cycle of three odes in Greek verse by Anacreon; an almost hedonistic celebration of love and sweet pleasures. Featuring some beautiful and sumptuous playing by Kelly, these songs are immediately attractive and captivate the listener. Simmons demonstrated impressive vocal strength during these songs, but overpowered Manghi's otherwise-fantastic accompaniment from time to time.

Baritone, Angus, returned to the stage once again to present *Sept Mélodies* (of which there were curiously only four), by Ernest Chausson. Here, the young baritone showed signs of considerable development since he was last heard in Tauranga ; no doubt a result of his time in Europe. Some of his finest singing came in his delivery of these songs, of which the second, *Le Charme*, stands out as a particularly sweet and delicate musical moment. Later on, he would deliver an encore performance from his 2020 farewell recital, Poulenc's first (and perhaps most humorous) attempt at a song cycle – *Le Bestiaire*. Both Simmons and Kelly captured perfectly the quirkiness and essence of each member of this ridiculous menagerie.

Soprano, Anna, went on to present a very satisfying performance of Ibert's *Deux Stèles Orientées*, which featured the most intoxicating opening introduction by Manghi, leaving the listener starved for more. The Italian flautist did not disappoint, however, going on to complete the accompaniment of these soprano songs with unmatched interpretive virtuosity. The two performers would again compliment one another once more for Albert Roussel's *Deux Poèmes de Ronsard* which showcased some impressive dynamic contrast and control from the soprano as well as some considerable sensitivity in the communication of the French text. Not to be outdone, Manghi's nightingale in the first of the two songs, captured exquisitely the unmistakable songs of this bird who so often makes an appearance in romantic song.

Perhaps the afternoon's finest moment was Manghi and Kelly's interpretation of Poulenc's magnificent *Sonate pour flûte et piano*. Often heard in flute recitals, but perhaps rarely with as much passion, precision and sheer energetic virtuosity than partners Kelly and Manghi seem to muster, this performance surely cements their status as two of New Zealand finest recitalists. A masterclass on the true nature of ensembleship, they complimented and supported one another with limitless sensitivity and warming dedication throughout. Manghi's fierce and fiery energy in the first movement made for a tremendous and remarkable contrast to the profound

passion of the second movement. Of the final *presto*, Poulenc's amusingly quipped that it should be played as quickly as possible because, "it isn't any good". Upon hearing Kelly and Manghi's superb and exciting delivery this afternoon, it is surely doubtful that Poulenc would still be of that same opinion.

Just two years ago Tauranga Musica bid farewell to Anna and Angus Simmons who were en route to Europe to continue their musical journeys. Thus far, this time and experience abroad seems to have been good for the young singers. We look forward to following the progression of their musical careers with much interest, especially, Anna, who is one of Tauranga's own. Thank you, Tauranga Musica for another enjoyable afternoon of chamber music.

Chalium Poppy