

Concert Review
Trio Madeleine for Tauranga Musica
Sunday, March 30, Wesley Methodist Church

Tauranga Musica's 2025 concert season launched in fantastically French fashion on Sunday with an outstanding concert delivered by the Trio Madeleine. The trio is comprised of pianist, David Kelly; flautist, Luca Manghi; and clarinetist, Jonathan Cohen.

The trio opened their concert with a work celebrating its centenary this year, Maurice Emmanuel's *Sonata for Flute, Clarinet and Piano, Op. 11*. Emmanuel – a contemporary of Debussy, and greatly influenced by him – often experimented with older styles of composition, such as free rhythm and modes, to the consternation of Delibes, his teacher at the time.

Taking the *con spirito* marking of the first movement to heart, Manghi and Cohen produced a beautiful effect seamlessly weaving the chatty and rhythmic conversation of their respective instruments together culminating in a beautiful climax towards the end. It is a movement that is brimming with immense optimism which was captured well by the expressiveness and exuberance of the players.

The second movement's somewhat jazzy harmonies first introduced convincingly by the piano saw the tables turned with Manghi and Cohen really accompanying Kelly whose part features so prominently in the movement. There were some notably tragic and beautifully somber phrases from the winds in places but Kelly's thoughtful and sensitive delivery at the piano really shone through.

The final movement returned to the optimism of the first and then some. Here the virtuosic talents of all three performers, who so succinctly captured the playful spirit of the final *allegro* was clear to all.

Cohen and Kelly then took to the stage to perform Debussy's challenging *Première Rhapsodie for Clarinet and Piano*; a competition piece deliberately designed to expose any technical inadequacies of its performers. From the first strains of its soft, haunting opening, Cohen demonstrated incredible control and musicality; his expressive playing capturing the many moods inherent in the piece. After its composition Debussy declared it one of the most pleasing pieces he had ever written and one is inclined to agree after hearing this music in the hands of a performer as competent and as musically eloquent as Cohen.

Manghi and Kelly followed this with Poulenc's famous and much-loved *Sonata for Flute and Piano*; a repertory staple for any serious flautist. Manghi perfectly captured the melancholic nature of the first movement from the first notes of the opening descending theme. The music, obviously demanding of the performer, was performed with seemingly little effort by Manghi who played with exquisite sensitivity and tenderness. The contrasting final movement, resembling something of a classical rondo, was both joyful and fun in the hands of Kelly and Manghi. Poulenc who famously instructed the final movement to be played "as fast as you can, because it isn't any good", had obviously not heard the work performed by such masters as Kelly and Manghi. The final movement was both virtuosic and thrilling.

Cohen then returned to the stage to join Manghi to perform Koechlin's fascinating *Sonatine Modale, Op. 155*; a five- movement work showcasing the composer's interest in modal and ancient musical styles. This was a highlight of the programme for those who could never imagine how beautiful the sound of a solo flute and clarinet could be. A carefully and exquisitely crafted piece of music, the performers managed to capture the unique and individual character of each movement, culminating in the final movement's playful and satisfying quasi country dance.

Kelly then rejoined his colleagues to perform Saint-Saëns' *Tarantelle for Flute, Clarinet and Piano, Op. 6*; a wonderful character piece in which all three player's virtuosic skill were well showcased. The spectre of Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals* looms large in the presence of this *Tarantelle* which also paints such marvellously vivid pictures and shows the composer's genius as a master orchestrator. Not even the tricky telltale and compulsory accelerando towards the end could break the determination, wild energy, and ensembleship of these amazing performers who played with aplomb to the end.

The concert ended most satisfactorily with a suite of melodies from Bizet's much-loved Spanish-flavoured opera, *Carmen* arranged for flute, clarinet and piano by American, Michael Webster. A charming arrangement of these well-known melodies, it was, however not without its pleasant surprises and featured

some rather challenging flute writing in the famous Habanera which the incomparable Manghi made short work of. Ending in an exciting and fulfilling flourish, the three performers received prolonged, well-deserved applause from an extremely grateful and appreciative audience.

If this is a but the overture to the performances yet to come in their 2025 concert season, then surely Tauranga Musica has yet another exciting year of chamber music planned for Tauranga music lovers. Be certain not to miss their next performance featuring pianist, Liam Wooding on Sunday 4 May at Baycourt.

Chalium Poppy
March 2025