

Concert Review - Tauranga Musica
Saxcess
Sunday 10 March

Congratulations to Tauranga Musica on a fantastic beginning to their 2019 concert season. Their first concert of the season on Sunday evening saw New Zealand saxophone quartet, Saxcess, playing to an impressive-sized and enthusiastic audience at Baycourt's exhibition space. Perhaps it is the traditionalist in me, but I must confess some initial apprehension and skepticism about just how much I would enjoy an entire evening of not just one but FOUR saxophones. How wrong I was.

Saxcess is an ensemble of four of our country's brightest and most talented, and versatile musicians. They are to be commended and lauded for their efforts to bring the saxophone out from its obscure place in jazz bands and military bands and into the realms of chamber music. No easy feat. And this shows just how dynamic, clever, and even how downright passionate these musicians are.

While not a great amount of repertoire is written for solo saxophone (much less for a quartet of them), Saxcess relies heavily upon transcriptions of everything from Bach to the Beatles in order to produce a well-rounded and diverse concert programme. Some of these attempts are more successful than others. Surprisingly, works like Ravel's famous Bolero and a Canzona by Frescobaldi translate well for the instruments and are in fact refreshing. Works by Handel and Bach, however, with their rapid articulated semi-quaver passages, perhaps fail to hit the mark somehow.

Sunday's concert, however, featured many moments of intense musical beauty and even drama. Pierne's "Chanson D'Autre Fois" and Iturralde's "Pequena Czardas" in particular perhaps showcased this ensemble and the instruments at their very finest. Additionally, Bernstein's "Balcony Song" and the Beatles' "When I'm 64" were terrifically entertaining.

Not surprisingly, there was a healthy portion of New Zealand content on their programme. Works written by well-known names such as Farr and Harris were quirky, exciting, went down magnificently well and demonstrated just how versatile this instrument truly is. Particular mention must be made to Saxcess's own tenor, Peter Liley, whose recent composition for this ensemble, "Uretiti", is a masterpiece of New Zealand flavour, perfectly depicting the natural beauty and drama of a typical coastal scene.

While not every piece can and will translate effectively onto the saxophone, more often than not, this talented quartet does an absolutely outstanding job of demonstrating the versatility and true potential of this fantastic invention - the saxophone.