

Concert Review
Tauranga Musica
29 July, 2020 at Baycourt Exhibition Space

Tauranga concert-goers were treated to an enchanting evening of flute music in a recital given by Bridget Douglas and accompanied by John van Buskirk on piano. As was to be expected, the programme featured a great deal of French repertoire but also contained some New Zealand content as well.

Douglas and van Buskirk began where arguably performance music begins for the flute - with CPE Bach (son of the well-known JS Bach). A composer for the court of Frederick the Great (reputed himself to be a fine flautist) in Berlin, Bach was able to indulge his monarch's love of the instrument by producing an enormous canon of works for the instrument. Douglas performed his Sonata in G Major with tremendous dignity and skill, paying tender attention to the delicate phrases and polishing it off with gloriously effective trills and ornaments. Van Buskirk wisely provided a very measured accompaniment mimicking the limited scope of the intended harpsichord accompaniment.

Not surprisingly, the programme included Poulenc's Sonata for Flute and Piano; a favourite work in any flautist's repertoire. One never tires of hearing this work, especially when it is performed by such a talented and consummate performer. Douglas captured the various moods of each individual movement quite perfectly; from the witty playfulness of the first to the graceful elegance of the second, to finally the thrilling virtuosity of the last.

To close the concert's first half, Douglas and van Buskirk chose New Zealand composer, Anthony Ritchie's 1993 flute concerto. The first movement is an exciting exploitation of both the performer's skill and the instrument's remarkable range; fantastically rhythmic and with a ridiculously complex cadenza passage somewhere in the middle which didn't fail to excite. The second movement was sufficiently thoughtful, perhaps even pensive and somewhat melancholy but set the stage for the final movement with a rather cheeky melody which seemed to build endlessly through a steady rhythm provided by van Buskirk. He must also be commended for making very easy work at the piano of a rather complicated and busy orchestral score. Bravo!

The concert's second half began with movements from a Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano by French composer, Claude Bolling. Unmistakably French in flavour, this work clearly displayed both player's versatility as musicians. The first movement began something like a quasi-baroque minuet but soon morphed into a sultry blues affair. The second movement contained perhaps one of the evening's most beautiful musical moments - an exquisite soaring melody followed by some rather challenging dialogue for the two musicians.

Another suite followed, this time by Ernest Bloch - the Suite Modale. A curious work, written not in a key per se, but rather in the Phrygian mode; a mode of composition considered by the medievals to be associated with all things mystic. The work certainly appeared to be searching for something through the first movement. While the second contained moments of hopefulness, the third contained perhaps the happiest gigue I can remember that I've heard in a minor mode. Whether intentional or unintentional, both Douglas and van Buskirk achieved to great effect a sense of unfinished nostalgia.

Douglas closed with another favourite piece of the flautist's concert repertoire, the Concertino by French composer, Cecile Chaminade. Pure beauty. Pure virtuosity. Pure perfection. Magnificent sweeping and epic phrases partnered with unforgiving chromatic scales all masterfully played with precision and aplomb.