

## Review

# The New Zealand Trio: Ashley Brown cello, Amalia Hall Violin, and Somi Kim piano performing at Nelson Centre for Music Arts

Saturday, October 12 at 7 pm.

## Triptych 3

### Untamed Hope

On arrival at the NCMA we were ushered into the Recital Hall because ticket sales indicated the unsuitability of the Auditorium. At first there was a sense of disappointment at this change but it quickly became apparent that we were the lucky ones. We were up close to 3 of NZ's most accomplished musicians and had the enormous pleasure of experiencing direct involvement in an outstanding presentation of the works of 4 brilliant women composers.

The works were from the early Romantic Period with Fanny Mendelssohn's (GER;1805-1847) Piano Trio in D minor Op 11, late 19th century Ethel Smyth (UK;1858-1944) Trio in D Minor (1880), early 20th Century, Joan Tower (USA; B.1938) Trio Cavany (2007) and a contemporary composition by Eva Bedggood (NZ; B.2003) Ukiyo The Floating World.

Excellent programme notes by Charlotte Wilson (which I have drawn on) provided comprehensive information about the incredible struggle Fanny, Ethel and Joan endured as they pursued their musical studies.

Ethel, a child prodigy, became a Dame, a suffragette and the most important female composer in Britain. A passionate campaigner for women's rights she wrote the suffragette anthem "The March of the Women" which was sung in Wellington at the start of the Women's movement in the 80's.

Joan, now 85 and living in New York, is still composing and teaching her beloved students. Also a feminist icon famous for her "Fanfares for the Uncommon Woman" in response to Copland's "or the Common Man". She was the first woman to receive the coveted Grawemeyer Award as well as Chamber Music America's National Service Award, the Gold Baton and a rack of honorary doctorates and three Grammys.

The Concert opened with Ethel Smyth's Piano Trio in D minor. Written in the traditional Romantic structure of 4 movements, the musical style was predictable but beautifully structured and expressed by the Trio. In the first movement, Allegro non Troppo, the cello beautifully introduced the opening theme which was taken over by the violin. The piano shone through the string texture. Wonderful climaxes and melodic phrases ended the movement gently.

The second movement, Andante, with its Romantic textures led on to the 3rd movement Scherzo Presto con brio with its fiery rhythmic themes highlighting superb piano technique. Finally the fourth movement, Allegro vivace, which

featured stunning solo and unison passages driving towards the epic final chords. This was a remarkable performance of a great work.

Piano Trio “Cavany” by Joan Tower is a 20 minute rhapsodic work in one movement. All three instruments in solo passages and in dramatic combinations with driving often percussive piano passages created an orchestral effect.

The second part of the Concert featured the new work “Ukiyo - The Floating World” by Christchurch composer Eva Bedggood. It is a beautiful one movement composition which elegantly expresses Eva’s explanation of the title. It refers to a Japanese proverb meaning “living in the moment, detached from the bothers of life, caring about the present and the state of our minds”. The composition required the instruments to combine into rich textures but also present poignant melodic solo sections.

Finally the NZ Trio thrilled the audience with the stunning performance of Fanny Mendelssohn’s Piano Trio in D Minor, Opus 11. This monumental work demonstrated her musical genius. Written in the romantic tradition of 4 movements a month before she died at the age of 42, it was acknowledged as a masterpiece with its gorgeous melodies and sonorous Brahmsian harmonies.

The Trio begins with Allegro molto vivace. Two song-like movements follow, the 3rd referencing an aria from “Elijah.” The Finale opens with stately Bach-like flourishes becoming passionately romantic before the powerful ending.

The audience was quick to reward this exciting performance with joyful applause and 3 curtain calls.

This concert felt like a precious gift. To programme 4 significant women composers and then to present each work with such magnificent virtuosic playing was ultimate Chamber Music experience. It was thrilling and I wish more Nelson music lovers had been as privileged as we were.

There is no doubt that the NZ Trio is a national Taonga. The virtuosity they display, the vast repertoire and performances they have presented are monumental. The obvious rapport and respect they have for each other conveys to the audience great commitment and understanding of the works they perform.

The number of commissioned works they have added to the genre is also hugely important and the contribution they make to the musical life of NZ and beyond is profoundly significant .

Colleen Marshall