

## **Kristallnacht Unity Concert – a commemoration of solidarity in a place of worship**

This year's Kristallnacht commemoration concert on 10 November brought us more of the annual event's distinctive quality – works associated with the Holocaust performed by leading New Zealand musicians. The concert's impact was enhanced by taking place in Wellington's Beth El Synagogue.

Distinguished guests included members of the diplomatic corps, among whom were the ambassadors of Germany, Israel, Poland, the Netherlands and Hungary, and Deputy Chief of Mission for Italy and the United States of America.

As well as remembering the violent Nazi pogrom against the German and Austrian Jews on 9-10 November 1938, the concert – presented jointly by the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand (HCNZ) Te Pūtahi Urupatu o Aotearoa and the New Zealand School of Music Te Kōki, Victoria University of Wellington – was also a Unity Concert in memory of the 15 March 2019 massacre at the Christchurch Mosques.

Introducing the concert, HCNZ chairperson Deborah Hart underlined the link between Kristallnacht and Christchurch, and Rabbi Ariel Tal explained the appropriateness of having the concert in a sacred place. A noted campaigner for refugees, Somalia-born Adam Awad, ended his appreciation of the evening with the heartfelt words: "We are together."

Works by Jewish composers included the opening bracket, *Five pieces for string quartet* by Erwin Schulhoff, a Czech who died in a Bavarian concentration camp in 1942. The student group Sixteen Strings playing the pieces showed why they won this year's NZ-wide NZCT secondary schools chamber music contest with their brilliant performance of this same work.

The Te Kōki Trio of NZ School of Music teachers Martin Riseley (violin), Inbal Megiddo (cello) and Jian Liu (piano) performed the *Piano Trio* by Mieczyslaw Weinberg, a Polish Jew who survived the Shoah by moving to Russia, and was a close friend of Shostakovich.

An indigenous contribution was brought into the concert with the playing of taonga pūoro (traditional Māori instruments) by Ruby Solly, joining with the NZ String Quartet in Gareth Farr's *He Poroporoaki* (Saying goodbye) composed for the 2008 Dawn Service at Gallipoli.

The NZ String Quartet, Helene Pohl and Monique Lapins (violins), Gillian Ansell (viola) and Rolf Gjelsten (cello), also accompanied leading NZ opera singer Margaret Medlyn, with Jian Liu (piano) in the beautiful "Marietta's song" from the opera *Die tote Stadt* (The Dead City) by Erich Korngold, one of the founders of film music, who escaped the Shoah by moving to Los Angeles in 1938.

New Zealand's first Kristallnacht commemoration concert, in 2008, was based on the performance of Boris Pigovat's *Holocaust Requiem*. This year a quartet of talented student viola players plus Professor Donald Maurice presented the Russian-Israeli Pigovat's *Nigun*, which instead of using traditional melodies gives spirited, but often sad and harsh impressions of the Jews' tragic history.

This memorable concert ended on a bittersweet note. The last bracket consisted of jazz and cabaret songs from the camps, sung by rising star soprano Barbara Graham accompanied by David Barnard on piano and piano accordion, and clarinetist Ben van Leuven. The "Auschwitz

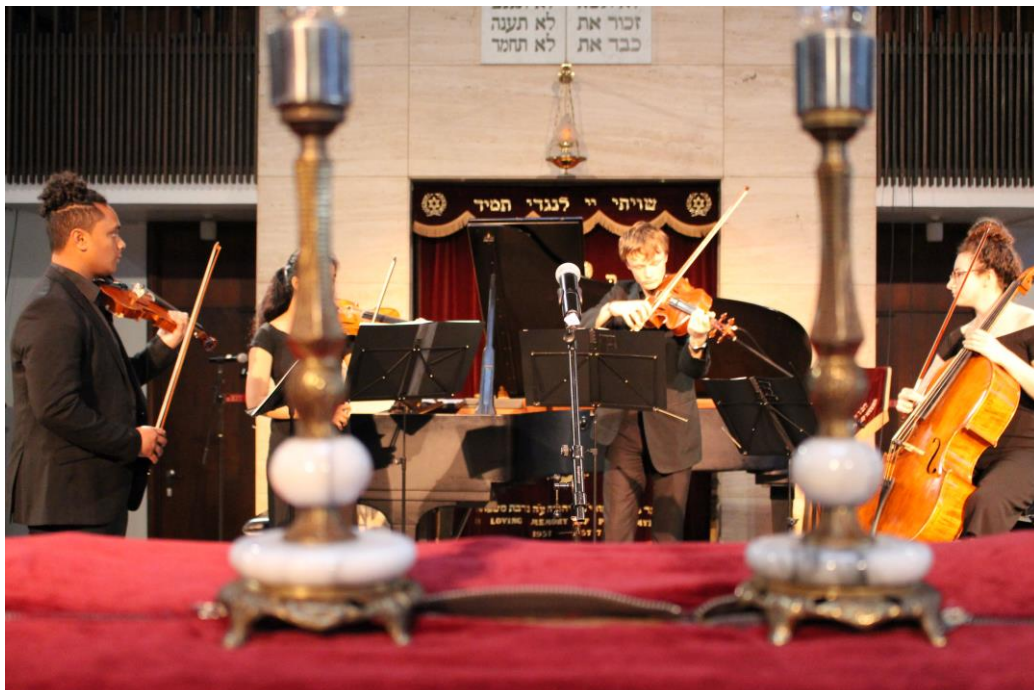
song” and “Westerbork Serenade” – composed in the Dutch transit camp for those on their way to death – were outstandingly poignant.

David Zwartz

Photos: Tom Rockman-Arielly, HCNZ.



Seen from the bima of Wellington's Beth El synagogue, soprano Margaret Medlyn sings “Marietta’s song” from the opera *Die tote Stadt* by Erich Korngold, accompanied by the New Zealand String Quartet, on a stage in front of the Ark.



The award-winning Sixteen Strings Quartet performing Erwin Schulhoff's *Five pieces for string quartet*.



*Somalia-born Muslim community leader Adam Awad says "We are together" before the Kristallnacht Unity Concert in Wellington's Beth El Synagogue.*



*Ruby Solly playing one of the traditional Māori instruments (taonga pūoro) in the performance of NZ composer Gareth Farr's He poroporoaki (Saying goodbye).*