

Kristallnacht Concert - November 2018

Music, remembrance and hope

With the theme of “music, remembrance and hope”, the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand’s *Kristallnacht* concert met all three qualities to the highest degree.

For this 80th anniversary of the horrifying events of 9-10 November 1938, the programme’s eight items covered a range of music by Jewish composers – two of whom perished in the Shoah (Holocaust) – and ranged from Gustav Mahler’s teenage piano quartet to the final piece, “Violins of hope,” by Israeli Ohad Ben-Ari which was first performed in Berlin on International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2015.

The top-class performers came from the NZ School of Music at Victoria University of Wellington, the NZ Symphony Orchestra, plus Israeli violin soloist Tal First, vocalists Pasquale Orchard and Lauren Nottingham, and tap dancer Raicheal Doohan.

‘Degenerate music’ (*Entartete Musik*) is how the Nazis described the works of Jewish musicians like Mahler and Mendelssohn. Their compositions were banned (a mindless and hateful attitude shared by Malaysia’s present Prime Minister). Another banned composer was Kurt Weill whose famous songs “Mack the knife” and “Alabama song” were performed in authentic Weimar Republic style by Lauren Nottingham, accompanied by Mark Donlon.

Paul Hermann was a Hungarian-born virtuoso cellist who was forced by antisemitism to move first to Berlin, later to Paris, but performed frequently in England and the Netherlands, specializing in contemporary music. His own Piano Trio, played by Tal First, Inbal Megiddo (cello) and Jian Liu (piano), is fresh and modern within a classical framework. Hermann was arrested in Vichy France and deported from the infamous Drancy camp in 1944, never to be heard of again.

A bracket of works by Jewish Dutch composer Dick Kattenburg showed his appealing melodic style, using modern tonalities and jazzy rhythms. They included his seven ‘Palestinian songs’ (the final one is ‘Hatikvah,’ the Israeli national anthem) sung by Pasquale Orchard, accompanied by Jian Liu. A first for the annual *Kristallnacht* concerts was the spirited tap dancing of Raicheal Doohan to Kattenburg’s music performed by piano duo Jian Liu and Hamish Robb, who also gave us another of his four-hands compositions. Aged only 24, Kattenburg was sent to his death in Auschwitz in 1944.

Now studying at Juilliard School in New York, 23-year-old Israeli violinist Tal First shows enormous promise. His tone is warm and pure. The performance of Olivier Messiaen’s *Quartet for the end of time*’s last movement, with Jian Liu on the piano, conveyed beautifully the music’s spirituality.

The *Violins of Hope*’ is a collection of violins restored by Israeli violin maker Amnon Weinstein – violins that were once played in the ghettos and concentration camps, or belonged to victims of the Shoah. The piece of music of the same name, for violin, cello, and string orchestra was commissioned by the Berlin Philharmoniker from Israeli composer Ohad Ben-Ari, who has lived in Berlin since 2010.

The orchestra for this performance was the inaugural performance by the Sinfonia for Hope, established to give an annual concert to raise money for humanitarian causes.

Conducted by Donald Maurice, with soloists Tal First (violin) and Inbal Megiddo (cello), the orchestra gave a moving presentation of Ben-Ari's work, giving us the full range from tender poignancy, through robust passages to the ethereal ending conveying the hope of the violins project.

A concert for *Kristallnacht* was first presented ten years ago for the 70th anniversary, when Donald Maurice was the viola soloist for a memorable performance (available on CD) of Boris Pigovat's *Requiem*. At this 80th anniversary concert, Professor Maurice spoke of the NZ School of Music's ongoing commitment to an annual event (which it has been since 2015). We must be deeply grateful for this. Not only do we get to hear music that would otherwise not be performed in Wellington (or New Zealand), but the quality of playing (and singing and dancing), whether from professional NZSO musicians or from NZ School of Music staff or students, is of the highest standard. The donation of their time and talents is very much appreciated.

For the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand, the presentation of music banned in the 1930s because of its Jewishness, and of music by composers killed because of their Jewishness, is deeply moving and affirming of the HCNZ's vision of Holocaust remembrance and education.

David Zwartz