

Harbour Light

November 10, 2016 by [harryfiddler](#)

The night before Tony Abbott was elected prime minister I went to the Sydney Opera House to hear Lior and the Sydney Symphony. And the night of the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, I find myself at the Opera House again, for [Acacia Quartet](#)'s concert, entitled 'Harbour Light', in the Utzon Room. Music, as ever, is a consolation.

The Acacias have worked hard over the six years since they first came together, and achieved much. There have been five CDs and three ARIA nominations. More importantly, there have been any number of commissions, collaborations and deep dives into the music of here and now. This concert was no exception: a bold program of new works by Australian composers [Sally Whitwell](#), Nick Wales and [Joe Twist](#) alongside three works by Philip Glass, George Gershwin and Bernard Herrmann.

I've mostly experienced Nick Wales' music as underscore or music for dance, but on the evidence of this work, it more than fills the stage on its own. Harbour Light has a wonderful sense of pace and drama, like a brilliantly written four-hander. Wales originally wrote it for string ensemble but, at after nagging from the Acacia Quartet, adapted it here for four voices. Their instincts were good. The lush and complex string textures are still there when the music needs it, but the individual gestures shine out.

'Face to the Sun' is Sally Whitwell's first string quartet, and it's a thing of beauty. The layers of texture she adds to the lively rhythms and seductive harmonic agenda reveal a pianist-turned-composer with much more to say. The Acacias gave 'Face to the Sun' an energetic, glowing first performance, and I'm sure there'll be many more.

You can't listen to 'Spongebob's Romantic Adventure' without a smile on your face. Composer Joe Twist has conjured up a wacky tale bursting with character. It's tricky, too, but the quartet handled the rhythmic and expressive lurches from melodrama to high comedy with impressive fluency.

Works by George Gershwin, Bernard Herrmann and Philip Glass completed the program. The Utzon Room, as ever, did no favours for the string sound, but the Acacia Quartet battled on, finding a rare delicacy in the Gershwin, and vivid glimpses of movies imagined and real in the Herrmann.

As the concert ended and the phones went back on reality came flooding back in but, at least, it was reality coloured by a head full of beautiful sounds. Art matters. Especially now.