

ACACIA QUARTET: 'RHYTHM AND TEXTURE' @ THE UTZON ROOM, SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

OCTOBER 31, 2017 PAUL NOLAN

Acacia Quartet presented its most recent concert to an ecstatic reception from the assembled audience in the Sydney Opera House's Utzon Room. Named 'Rhythm and Texture', this programme offered existing and new fans a modern classic of the string quartet repertoire plus a keenly diverse quartet of works from the mid twentieth century to right now.

Engaging and gripping from the outset, the concert from this prominent quartet on the Australian musical landscape drew on its collective experience and skill to present intricacies of rhythm in the ingenious works selected. Broad, beautiful shifts of texture or successive textural complexities and string effects in the various modern works were also clearly demonstrated to the attentive audience.

Acacia Quartet's is always willing to perform brand new works by local or locally-based composers alongside other established works for the quartet genre. Here we witnessed music making which never strayed from being groundbreaking in programming, charismatic in its emotional delivery and crystal clear in its communication. From start to finish it was a consistently edge-of-the-seat listening experience. Superbly crafted works for the genre were excellently showcased and no modern work was inaccessible in the hands of the Acacia string players.

A standout on an emotional level was the opening work, *Tenebrae* (2000) by Osvaldo Golijov. Elaborating fragments of chant from Catholic Easter Masses, this work's greater concerns touch on concepts of war in the Holy Land, our personal and planet's predicaments as seen as part of the big picture and Jewish identity through linking the music to the Hebrew alphabet.

There were some simply beautiful sounds and ensemble textures created here to open the concert event. Pure sorrow, despair and tentative gentleness were carefully exchanged amongst the members of the Acacia Quartet.

From deeply emotional colour in this opening to sensitive, unique precision we were next taken to the unique rhythmic and textural manipulation of Shostakovich. Acacia Quartet brought his *String Quartet No 7 in F sharp major Op 108* into its concert repertoire with great style and authenticity.

This performance had uncompromising accuracy and brevity of gesture which spoke volumes. Its frank delivery of pure musical gems suited Shostakovich's expressive palette. The work was a perfect choice to illustrate in this concert how complexities of rhythm and textural manipulation give extramusical concerns true shape and colour.

A world premiere was next in line for the audience. **Lyle Chan's** "*Andante Moderato*" expanded motifs from the point of view of a friend in first contact with Mahler's sixth symphony. The need to resonate in lush textures and during close part writing for Chan's personal piece was well met here.

Both the studies of delicate minutiae or joy in broad brush swipes for the friend discovering a musical work were earnestly outlined by Acacia Quartet. In turn, the Utzon Room audience also had the thrill of discovering anew the exquisite moments of Chan's unique composition.

Energy and sheer power continued to be resources easily in reserve for the performers as the quartet presented Javier Álvarez's colourful work *Metro Chabacano*, composed in 1991. Acacia Quartet's players blended well to function as one driving instrument and also as component parts to mimic a public sculpture's design and movement, showing how the elements of rhythm and texture can be quite radically hewn in order to create new art forms from existing art.

Following interval, the earliest, most extended and most well known work on the programme was performed. Ravel's *String Quartet in F major* (1903) was played with vigour and a freshness that made us discover its clever approach to phrasing, articulation and structure for the string quartet machine afresh.

Violinist **Lisa Stewart** led her colleagues **Myee Clohessy**, **Stefan Duwe** and **Anna Martin-Scrase** fearlessly through a rendition of this Ravel classic which rocketed through quicker movements, enjoyed a penetrating lyricism in the slow movement and presented the listener with a well punctuated and nuanced version of this classic's multi-layered dimensions.

The powerhouse '*Rhythm and Texture*' programme can still be heard in Melbourne Recital Centre's Salon on Sat Nov 4 at 6:30pm. It would be well worth the trip before these performances are hopefully preserved in recording.