



Living Colours: Pacific Sounds and Spirit – Music by Bruce Crossman

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CLASSICAL NEW MUSIC

Artist/s: **Lotte Latukefu (mezzo-soprano), James Cuddeford (violin), Tristram Williams (trumpet), Michael Kieran Harvey (piano), Claire Edwardes and Peter Neville (percussion)**

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Reviewed by [Gwen Bennett](#)

“Australian composers are frequently known for integration of Asian influences in their music; Bruce Crossman goes a few steps further with his distinctive compositions, mixing lesser-known Asian instruments with contemporary western sounds.”

The wealth of musical activity in Pacific rim countries is clearly a source of inspiration to Crossman, adding a fascinating dimension to music from a European heritage. His discerning blend of East and West creates an intriguing, kaleidoscopic sonic world, one that carries a strong emotional impact.



Bruce Crossman

Double Resonances for piano and percussion opens with dramatic booms, interspersed by reverberations and silences – a wonderfully atmospheric beginning that immediately impresses, generating a keen expectation of what might follow. The Korean temple gong, Filipino kulintang or Chinese Shang-tiao, integrated with avant-garde piano music, is exotic and at the same time profoundly moving. The stillness of the first part is broken by turbulence, but soon returns to a meditative tranquillity; the mood might sometimes be whimsical or lyrical, with occasional jazzy interpolations. This absorbing work is performed by virtuoso pianist Michael Kieran Harvey and percussionist extraordinaire Claire Edwardes.

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The basis of *Not Broken Bruised-Reed* is explained by the composer as “from the Judeo-Christian idea of not breaking a bruised-reed or snuffing out a light but instead allowing it to flourish”. The work opens with sparse, spaced notes from piano, violin and percussion; the composer uses silence and semi-silence to great effect. High, sweet fragments for the violin and muted piano figures are menaced by drum rolls and gongs, building to a dramatic climax, which includes an unexpected spoken phrase from the performers. Myriads of fascinating sounds – listen especially for the kulintang gong-chimes, strident k'waenggari and soft Korean ching drones – lead to a soft, delicate ending. Violin virtuoso James Cuddeford gives an accomplished and spirited interpretation of the composer's multiple demands, as do Claire Edwardes and Michael Kieran Harvey.



Gentleness-Suddenness is described by Crossman as a “meditation on love and creativity”, settings of texts from Chinese opera tradition of Kunqu (*The Peony Pavilion*) and Judeo-Christian Biblical texts from Genesis, Psalms, Song of Songs and Revelation. Given those inspirational sources, it is not surprising that this piece is a tour-de-force. Lotte Latukefu's mellow mezzo-soprano is a perfect tool for her expressive eloquence in delivering the many variations in the composition. From long notes, humming, disjointed utterances or occasional spoken word to fully voiced phrases, the content ranges from gentle to passionate and everything between. The first section, “Water and Fire”, starts softly and mysteriously, blending lovely harmonies and jazzy elements for the piano with high-pitched violin figures and Asian instruments; the second section, “Spirit”, starts with pianissimo murmurings for the voice with piano, percussion and violin, gradually building to a climax before a peaceful ending. A remarkable work.



Adrian and Katie Pertout, Colleen Crossman and Eve Duncane, and Bruce Crossman in Tokyo, 2014

Where are the Sounds of Joy? is inspired by the story of an Australian soldier in Gallipoli, re-imagining the war from a Chinese perspective through Kunqu (Chinese opera). In this piece the trumpet becomes a person, it talks to you – via an extraordinary array of sounds, half-sung, half-breath utterances with comments from other instruments. Jazz elements appear occasionally; warlike percussion is reminiscent of Peking opera. It is a most engaging and unusual composition. The trumpet is wonderfully expressive in the hands of Tristram Williams, aided by masterly musicianship from pianist Michael Kieran Harvey and percussionist Peter Neville.

The music was originally recorded by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 2013 and 2015, in two different venues yet with no discernable difference in acoustics; it was licensed for this Navona Records release.

Liner notes include recording details, biographies, photographs and the composer's program notes. Extended liner notes, scores and reviews are available on the Navona Records website.

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