

## Tauranga Musica Concert Review

### Double Shot - 21st May, 2023

One of my earliest recollections of orchestral studies was the introduction to the four families of musical instruments - string, woodwind, brass, and percussion. Percussion instruments are essentially defined as any instrument that is beat, struck, hit, smashed, scraped, rubbed, or that is generally aggressed upon by the performer. So an afternoon of not one, but two percussionists in performance seemed, at first glance, to be a very violent and hostile way to spend a Sunday afternoon. How wrong I was!

On Sunday, 21st of May, an enthusiastic Tauranga Musica audience was treated to a concert percussionist duo Yoshiko Tsuruta and Jeremy Fitzsimons- collectively known as "Double Shot".

The duo opened with American minimalist composer Steve Reich's 1994 work, *Nagoya Marimbas*. True to its minimalist form, the work began with a simple opening theme which over time became more and more elaborate; building, rather hypnotically to a frenzied climax. The work then gradually falls away again to the nothingness from which it seemingly began. Surely the greatest challenge of such a work is the effective achievement of the incrementally minute dynamic steps both upwards and downwards which must be perfectly in sync between the two performers. Tsuruta and Fitzsimons achieved this with exhilarating precision - a sufficiently exciting foretaste of the brilliant ensembleship which would permeate the afternoon.

New Zealand composer John Psathas' three-movement *Musica for Percussion Duo* (marimba and vibraphone) followed. Overall, the work has a decidedly Spanish flavour highlighted by emphatic foot stomping throughout the first movement. Notably, the second movement began with a long introductory passage beautifully performed by Fitzsimons on vibraphone which was quite dreamy in nature. The final movement built to a thrilling climax and displayed considerable concentration and coordination between the duo; Tsuruta's part effectively providing something of an engine to Fitzsimon's buttery solo.

Perhaps the most unorthodox, yet most fascinating work on the programme, *Table Talk for Prepared Vibraphone* by American Alyssa Weinberg, challenges the listener's perceptions of both time and pitch. Weinberg takes aim at musical convention by requiring performers to place a plethora of unconventional items about the vibraphone - from tin cans to kitchen pots - augmenting the sonic range and scope of the instrument. The work is akin to a stroll through a clock shop - a rather innocuous experience, unless one happens to be there when the hour strikes. The work is refreshing, interesting, challenging, and was performed with great precision and efficacy by the percussion duo.

The first half of the concert concluded with Michael Taylor's *Rhapsody for Vibraphone and Marimba*; a work peppered with decidedly Latin rhythmic elements. There are some complex textures and almost Bach-like interlocking figures. Of his composition, Taylor himself has stated, "My goal was to show the ease in which a particular style or mood of music could transform into another, sometimes gracefully, and at other times quite violently. Influenced heavily by classical, tango, heavy metal, and funk music, *Rhapsody for Vibraphone and Marimba* is sure to have a little something for everyone." Tsuruta and Fitzsimons surely understand this to a very deep level as they delivered a confident and extremely satisfying journey through a rich sonic and rhythmic landscape.

The concert's second half was dominated by Tsuruta's own transcription of Debussy's piano ballet, *La boîte à joujoux* (The Toy Box). What transpired was a truly inspired audio-visual feast; surely the next frontier in concert music and the highlight of the programme. Not only has Tsuruta painstakingly and effectively transcribed Debussy's piano vignettes for a vast array of percussion instruments, but she has also prepared wonderfully entertaining visual storybook using Andre Halle's original children's illustrations and translated text. The final product is magnificent and would instantly appeal to the child in all of us. Tsuruta and Fitzsimons worked tirelessly (and oft in a flurry of focus and cooperation) to bring this story to life. Who would have thought that an afternoon of beating, striking, smashing, and scraping could be so utterly satisfying? Not me!

Chalium Poppy  
Tauranga, 2023