

# **UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN CONCERT SERIES 2018 – 2019**

## **ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY CONCERT BAND NOVEMBER CONCERT**

***ERIC KIDD: Conductor***

***JUSTINA LEE: Piano Soloist***

***BETH MORRISON: Flute Soloist***

**BUTCHART RECREATION HALL**

***Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2018***

Aberdeen University Concert Band is a community band, open to students and staff of the University and also to anyone around and outwith the University. Music is important but there is a social side to the band as well. Although it is a non audition organisation it has some very talented players – that much was obvious and as far as I am aware no rubbish players either, or at least none I could see or hear. Conductor Eric Kidd told us that in the past he had conducted the band for some fifteen years or so and after a series of other conductors he was back, very much in charge on Friday. As well as being a talented and experienced musician with extensive experience of the wind and brass world, Eric is a particularly ‘nice guy’ and this came through in way he chatted to the audience as he introduced today’s programme.

The concert band is actually a huge ensemble with well over one hundred musicians. In addition to that, the Butchart Recreation Hall is a cavernous venue with a fairly resonant acoustic so it was no use listening for transparency of sound or dry details in the performance. At the same time however the finest arrangements in the concert, in particular the final piece ‘Pilatus: Mountain of Dragons’ allowed for an amazing amount of instrumental detail to come through. Several of the pieces, this included, had particularly fine solo playing, especially from the woodwind sections: Beth Morrison on flute, Debbie Haig on oboe (along with Sophie Westhead there were only two oboes in the band but my goodness didn’t they come through clearly). There was Sarah Eggleton on clarinet and Joe Stollery on saxophone. The percussion group were excellent, in particular kit drummer Sam MacDougall – and so many more that there is no room to mention.

The concert began with ‘Fanfare and Flourishes’ by James Curnow. The very title suggests exactly what you should choose to begin this type of concert and yet it was much more than this. The music has references to what became the European Anthem, the Te Deum by the French composer Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1634 – 1704) not to be confused with Gustave Charpentier (1860 – 1956) a much later French composer of opera. Today’s performance by the Concert Band certainly made me sit up and take notice at the start, the volume and force of the sound was amazing. The melody of the Te Deum came through clearly and there was a nice blending of early and later music in this piece.

‘Doyen’ by Goff Richards was another very powerful piece. I liked the way the percussion came through the blend. It sounded remarkably delicate and yet not a note was missed.

In a total change of mood, ‘The Seal Lullaby’ by Eric Whitacre was deliciously melodic and as gentle as such a big ensemble could manage. It had a beautiful melody served up nicely by piano soloist Justina Lee. Apparently the piece is very popular on Classic FM. The gentleman sitting next to me said how much he had enjoyed the Band’s performance with Justina.

The final set in the first half was ‘Indiana Jones Selection’ with the music of John Williams arranged for Concert Band by the Netherlands composer Hans van der Heide (b. 1958). The Raider’s March, Slave Children’s Crusade, Love Theme and Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade all rang out in glorious Hollywood style. I normally get my Christmas Dinner after these films but in the interval I did get a cup of coffee and there were Christmas pies too!

Japanese Tune by Soichi Konagaya was an astonishing piece. Eric Kidd warned us to hold on for the other three movements after the somewhat challenging opening. I actually liked the first movement with its throbbing percussion and pentatonic tune which did emerge out of the mixture. Eric Kidd said that those who enjoyed this first movement need to get out more. But Eric, I am out at concerts all the time. Actually the other movements were very much more approachable with gentler percussion and some very beautiful woodwind playing.

Another remarkable change of mood came with Morten Lauridsen's O Magnum Mysterium arranged for concert band by H. Robert Reynolds. At the beginning it was the warm playing of the brass that stood out. Written originally for voices, they sounded not unlike a rich organ blend. Lauridsen of course is no stranger to Aberdeen University Music he has visited a couple of times and in 2009 he was awarded an honorary DMus by the University.

Eric Kidd introduced the next soloist, flautist Beth Morrison who had come up through the ranks of Aberdeen Grammar School Band. Eric told us that this band is the finest school band in Scotland if not in the UK as a whole. They have won many Platinum Awards as has our soloist Beth Morrison. She gave a fabulous performance in 'Rhapsody for Flute' by Stephen Bulla.

Another American composer Frank Ticheli created a special arrangement of 'Loch Lomond'. Near the end, it brought together this Scottish tune with Danny Boy. They were very skilfully interwoven. I liked the little touch of tubular bells and the brass section were very fine in this piece.

I have already mentioned the final piece in the programme, 'Pilatus: Mountain of Dragons'. In many ways I think it was the best arrangement in the programme. Transparency, woodwind solos, fantastic timpani and more tubular bells were I thought just great, and I enjoyed the story behind the music which Eric Kidd told us before the performance.

Thank you Concert Band and welcome back Eric Kidd. We look forward to hearing you all again in the Beach Ballroom at the end of March next year.