

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN CONCERT SERIES 2018 – 2019

BRETT BAKER: TROMBONE

ANDREW CHEYNE: Piano accompaniments

KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL

Thursday 21st March, 2019

Aberdeen University Music hosted a very special recital on Thursday evening in King's College Chapel when top trombone virtuoso Brett Baker, Principal Trombone of the Black Dyke Band, educator, adjudicator, Championship Soloist and so much more paid a return visit to the University to delight and astonish us with a programme of some of the most exciting and challenging music for trombone. Brett was accompanied on piano by Andrew Cheyne in music that was every bit as challenging for the pianist as for the trombone player. Andrew too was just splendid throughout the entire performance.

Recordings of trombone music often span a wide range of styles and periods, many of those starting with music from the Baroque age which seems particularly suited to the tonal qualities of that instrument although as Brett Baker told us, the instruments of that era were very different from those available today, like the modern tenor trombone on which he played his entire programme. 'La Hieronya' from 'Musicali Melodie' (c 1621) is by Giovanni Martino Cesare, a composer and cornett player who worked near Augsburg in Bavaria. One edition of the music has a drawing of a sackbut and cornett player in action together.

Tonight's performance was beautifully smooth toned and not too loud, thus matching the idea of the sackbut. The playing was supple with its many fast turns accomplished with remarkable facility. Nothing as complex as what was to follow however. In some ways the music became more and more astonishing, more and more challenging. I watched the expression on the face of one elderly gentleman in the audience. He looked as if he were in musical heaven.

The second piece in the programme was the first movement of the 'Concerto for trombone' by Johann Georg Albrechtsberger (1736 – 1809). The Concerto was originally scored for alto trombone but Thursday's performance on tenor trombone was bright and jaunty with a splendidly played piano accompaniment that shared all those aspects. It was full of dangerous runs and fantastic trills. This was a splendidly flexible performance with a really exciting cadenza near the end of the movement.

The 'Concertino for Bass Trombone' by Carl Heinrich Meyer (1784 – 1837) was also performed on the tenor trombone which Brett Baker told us was not unlike the bass trombones of Meyer's time. It was an attractively melodic piece played with lovely smooth tone. The melody spanned a wide range from low to high flying notes. As the piece continued it morphed into a series of ever more challenging variations played with astonishing dexterity and seeming ease.

'Phenomenal Polka Caprice Fantasy' by Frederick Innes (1854 – 1926) was originally composed for cornet or trumpet but on Thursday we heard a marvellous setting for trombone. There were some surprising high notes and leaps. It made me think of the musical equivalent of those athletic circus performers known as tumblers.

Brett mentioned 'Atlantic Zephyrs' as being a great piece to play as an encore. This lively piece by Gardell Simons (1878 – 1945) could also be a test piece, a competition piece or just a show piece. The level of trombone virtuosity was continuing to rise and rise.

We were also constantly moving forward in time arriving now at 'Trombonology' by the famous Tommy Dorsey (1905 – 1956). This was a fast helter skelter piece that used the special technique known as 'doodle tonguing', a technique that enables you to play really fast lines more smoothly for jazz music. That certainly shone through in Brett's magical performance.

The final piece was 'Rhapsody for Trombone' composed in 1975 for the great Don Lusher by Gordon Langford (1930 – 2017). Brett matched Lusher's celebrated easy flowing smooth tone in this piece. What a marvellous sound!

Thursday's audience was not going to let Brett Baker off so lightly. They demanded an encore and he replied with a piece that has not yet been published, 'In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning'. It was simple and just delightful.