

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN CONCERT SERIES 2017 – 2018
THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN PERCUSSION FESTIVAL
DIRECTOR Dr LISA NICOL

FEATURING MEMBERS OF THE PERCUSSION DEPARTMENT:

MURRAY BARTLE	IAN CHRISTIE	RICHARD GLASSBY
DAVID HENDERSON	MORVEN HOLLICK	EUAN MacDONALD
BRODIE McCASH	EDEN MIKULA	PETER NEY
JOY SMITH	ROBYN WALKER	

BUTCHART RECREATION HALL

Friday 16th February, 2018

The second evening concert in the University of Aberdeen Percussion Festival featured eleven members of the Percussion Department introduced by the enthusiastic Dr Lisa Nicol. As on the previous evening, it was filled with variety, musical exploration and above all great fun. There was a reasonable audience turnout but with regard to the quality and exciting diversity of the music, the Hall should surely have been packed to capacity.

The performance began with a piece by George Hamilton Green Jr. an American xylophone virtuoso, composer and cartoonist (1893 – 1970) considered in his day to have been “the greatest xylophonist in the world”. Many of his pieces were from the Ragtime period. In ‘The Ragtime Robin’, the soloist was Peter Ney whose xylophone playing was full of rhythmic precision and pep. He was supported by two groups of two players on marimba. This piece provided a joyful and invigorating opening to the concert.

Following on with the theme of birds, was the World Premiere of a new piece by one of the University’s gifted young composition students Sarah Rimkus. Sarah introduced her piece entitled Blackbird as having catchy tunes, cute and sentimental. It was a challenging work for some of the players because at times they were required to stand opposite one another at the marimbas. This meant that these players had in a sense to find their notes the wrong way round in other words backwards. The four players did splendidly well. Some of the sounds were produced by bowing the notes of the marimbas producing up to four part chords at one point. Marimba and vibraphone were used and at one point, a change to the clean bell-like tones of a glockenspiel. Overall, the sound world of the piece was clean, transparent and quite delicious. Towards the end of the piece a certain oriental flavour came through. Was our blackbird singing in a lovely Japanese garden?

Yesterday one of the pieces was an improvisation which proved popular with the audience so today we heard a similar piece. It started with drumkit and moved on to an exciting variety of instruments. As in yesterday’s piece I was impressed by the way in which the players responded to one another picking up both rhythms and melodies, running with them and then following a different track suggested by a different player.

Catching Shadows is a piece by Ivan Travino, an American composer, percussionist and rock drummer currently working in Austin, Texas. A percussion sextet, it included two players on cajons, a kind of box-drum that the players Richard Glassby and Eden Mikula were able to sit on while they played. Eden also hit cymbals with her hands. I had thought the cajon was an Irish instrument because I had only seen it played before in Irish folk bands but I have since discovered that it comes from Peru. Four marimba players were very much to the fore. Here too a glockenspiel added a spicy flavour and most surprising of all voices were used to add an almost unearthly flavour to the music.

The final piece in the programme was the traditional African work from Zimbabwe which was a highlight of Thursday’s performance. Once again Morven Hollick opened the work playing the main motif on marimba. Gradually she was joined by other players until in a splendid crescendo all the performers were involved. Then, equally gradually different players left the stage until only Ian

Christie was left to give the theme a final solo crescendo on marimba before fading gently into silence. What a fascinating performance both in sound and in vision.

Dr Lisa Nicol reminded us that the full Percussion Ensemble along with Pandemonium the University Steel Pan ensemble will back in the Butchart on Wednesday 28th March. Catching Shadows will be performed again. Do come along. It will be worth it!