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Suite Brolga

Music of David Salisbury at the 2009

Australian Festival of Chamber Music,

reported by MALCOLM TATTERSALL

The Australian Festival of Chamber Music in Townsville, Australia's largest tropical city at nearly 160,000 people, is now well established in the nation's musical calendar. In its third year under the direction of Piers Lane and nineteenth altogether, it continues to build on the pattern established by Theodore Kuchar, founding Artistic Director: a core of three or four events per day running from a Friday evening to the following weekend, accompanied by educational and tourism-oriented components.

The first evening concert, in Civic Theatre (thirty years old, one thousand seats) was what the festival is all about: a near-capacity crowd for a programme of Ravel, Beethoven, Brahms and Shostakovich presented by the Goldner Quartet and individual artists from Australia, the UK, Canada, USA and Norway. This brief report, though, focuses on a much smaller event, the only concert in the festival to present music by a Townsville resident.



David Salisbury in Umbrella Studio. Photo © 2009 Malcolm Tattersall

David Salisbury trained at Berklee College of Music in Boston and the Boston Conservatorium. He is now a lecturer in composition at Townsville's James Cook University and regularly appears on reeds in local jazz groups. His wife Vicki sings with them on occasion but is primarily the director of Umbrella Studio, a community print-making studio and art gallery. When Vicki realised that the AFCM would coincide with Umbrella's exhibition of prints by indigenous artists, that didgeridoo player William Barton would be here again for the festival, and that a performance of David's new piece on the theme of an aboriginal legend might be possible, she approached the AFCM and they were happy to

incorporate the project in their programme. It is a lovely example of the synergies possible in a city that is still small enough to function as a community.

Sunday afternoon brought William Barton and Sydney percussionist Timothy Constable together with local quartet Serenata (flute, violin, viola and cello led by the flautist, Megan Donnelly) for a one hour concert in the gallery. There were two works -- *Magnetic Reflections*, a ten-minute piece descriptive of Horseshoe Bay on Magnetic Island, and *Suite Brolga*, which accompanies a re-telling of the legend of the Brolga.

The brolga is a very large, very graceful wading bird renowned for its courtship dances. The legend explains that it was originally a beautiful young girl who loved to dance, was stolen away by an evil spirit, and was transformed into a bird by the evil spirit to prevent her grieving clan from rescuing her. In a final piece of serendipity, the narrator was Shirley Collins, an indigenous print-maker represented on the wall by her lino-cut of the dancing brolga, which is her totem animal.



Shirley Collins' Brolga print. Photo © 2009 Malcolm Tattersall

Salisbury's music floats happily in the 'contemporary classical' zone between minimalism, ambient music and free jazz -- lovely sounds, with modal harmonies and repeated riffs behind serene melodies -- and the capacity audience gave it a very warm reception. The didgeridoo part of the longer piece is, interestingly, fully notated, which is a useful advance on the still-usual 'do something interesting after you hear X and we'll start again when you give us a nod' way of incorporating it into art music. Tonally, the didgeridoo provided the darker elements appropriate to the conflict and tragedy of the legend.

The Festival continues as I write. I understand that *M&V* will publish a full report from another correspondent soon after it winds up. If that reflects the mood of the audiences, it will be a very happy piece of journalism indeed.

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DAVID SALISBURY

AUSTRALIAN FESTIVAL OF CHAMBER MUSIC

TOWNSVILLE

WILLIAM BARTON

TIMOTHY CONSTABLE

UMBRELLA STUDIO

AUSTRALIA