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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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Aussie works alive and well

Music

By RICHARD WINDEYER

Guitar at Kings, Kings Hall, Old Parliament House, March 17.

EVEN WITH the interruption of the two fire alarms (at exactly the same point in the music) during the final work of the evening, this was an excellent, optimistic concert. Guitar Trek and staff from the Canberra School of Music presented a concert of contemporary Australian compositions all of which included guitar. Among the works was the first performance of Ross Edwards's *Eryato V* as well as works by three other famous Australian composers. Peter Sculthorpe, Nigel Westlake and Philip Houghton.

Natural Australian landscapes were evoked on a number of occasions, but none more so than in the opening Philip Houghton work, *Opals*. As a painter, Houghton considered Australia's opal with an artist's eye and then composed music designed to portray the colour palette he observed. The results were impressive, particularly in the first two movements. *Black Opal* sounded full of dark shards and *Water Opal* had a gorgeous, mellifluous feel. Houghton's *Two Night Movements* was one of the highlights with Barbara Jare-Gilby and Timothy Kain giving a spirited performance. The music contains an impressive contrast between the calm *Full Moon* and the more tortured, balmy *Banshee*.

Probably the most important aspect of the evening was the premiere performance of a new Ross Edwards work, *Eryato V*. New Australian compositions are always significant moments irrespective of the long-term critical assessment made of the work itself. In this case, one of Australia's most acclaimed composers was adding to the repertoire available to Australia's strong contingent of guitarists. I was enchanted by the dance like aspects of the work. I also thought the work powerfully evoked the natural Australian landscape, in part through the incorporation of sounds inspired by Aboriginal music.

All the works on the program received fine performances from the School of Music staff. In particular those works, which included percussion were enhanced by the flourish and flair of Gary Prance.

As stated in the opening, it was an optimistic concert. It showcased the strength and accessibility of quintessential Australian music composed in the final decades of the 20th century. It displayed the talented musicians in Canberra who are inspiring the next generation of Australian players and composers. And it left one confident that Australian contemporary classical music is alive, well, and most importantly being enjoyed by audiences.