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SYNDICATION



Trapped Between the Boomers and the X: Topology's Generation

Posted on Tuesday, October 21 @ 13:12:20 EST by [Kate Douglas](#)

review by Barnaby Ralph

[Brisbane Powerhouse](#) 18 October 03

To say that you know what to expect when you go to a Topology concert is a little unfair. They work hard to present concerts of diverse and interesting music, and have succeeded in mastering a wide variety of styles. Having said that, the size and instrumentation of the ensemble ensures a certain consistency of approach, and the tendency is toward the approachable end of contemporary repertoire. The group has a sound that is instantly recognizable, and audiences are guaranteed to hear well-prepared programmes that are just challenging enough without causing too much aural or ideological discomfort. Does this make Topology the 'safe' face of the post avant-garde musical scene?

Actually, I don't think that it does. A contemporary music group can hardly be criticised for putting on enjoyable concerts, and Topology is very good indeed at what it does. Saturday night's *Generation* concert was no exception. Beginning with Lynette Lancini's deliciously microcosmic 'Sapphire', they presented a programme of music from a younger generation of composers rooted strongly in the 1980s. Lancini's music was followed by 'Exit Points', a piece by Lindsay Vickery that was really a sort of musical road trip, exploring complex beat overlayings and contractions. Strong rhythmic support for the ensemble was provided by Robert Davidson on bass and Kylie Davidson on piano.

Next up was an odd duet, 'Chrissietina's Magic Fantasy' by Matthew Hindson, which was really a pastiche of various musical clichés from the 'Death Metal' era. Christa Powell and Bernard Hoey, sawing madly at their violin and viola respectively, threw themselves into this energetic piece whilst wearing horrifying fake mullets and glam t-shirts. Hoey even engaged in a spot of mock-moshing, rolling on the ground enthusiastically at one point. Whilst this was an entertaining work, however, it seemed to lack depth and the transitions between the contrasting elements tended to come across as abrupt at times.

One of the two musical highlights of the evening (for me, at least) was provided by the astonishing 'Viv's Bum Dance', a work by Brisbane-based *enfant terrible* and violin virtuoso John Rodgers. The piece was built on a twelve-bar repeating structure, clapped with fearsome accuracy by saxophonist John Babbage in a 5-4-3 beat emphasis structure, and Rodgers provided cross-rhythmic and melodic sections that sounded like they contracted or expanded in inverse proportion to the underlying pulse. All very complex, but I'd love to spend an instructive afternoon curled up on my sofa with the score and a packet of Tim Tams. Perhaps I need to get out more...

Tom Adeney's 'Toward Autumn' took us up to the end of the first half. In seven movements, the length of this work made it an odd pre-interval choice, and I felt that the programming didn't do this piece justice. I would have liked to have heard it at the beginning of the second half with fresh ears. All the same, Adeney's deft melodic touch and skilful scoring made for an interesting performance.

The second half began with a short work by John Babbage called 'Signature', which was refreshingly concise and intelligently written. Also shorter than expected was Stuart Greenbaum's 'Forever (Extended Play)'. I found this the weakest work in the programme. Fusing jazz, blues and extended techniques, the piece sounded derivative and a little tired, although still well played and arranged. Perhaps my ears and brain were flagging somewhat by this point, but the next piece woke them up. This was Robert Davidson's setting of two poems by e.e. cummings, cleverly integrating pitch and musical effects with a recording of the poet's own readings. In style, this recalled the magnificent Topology/Loops production of 'Airwaves', which set choice moments from 100 years of radio to music, and was certainly the other musical highlight of the concert.

The last piece on the programme was 'Throbology', featuring the rich tones of what I must describe as, for want of a better term, "that bigass horn". Actually, I think it's called a baritone saxophone, but find my name for it seems to fit the bill accurately enough. An energetic end to an excellent programme, Paul Stanhope's piece was well received by the eager audience, and Topology returned for a short encore. This was arranged by Hoey, and turned out to be a sort of Schoenbergesque version of Queen's 'We Will Rock You' that had everyone clapping and cheering by the end.

What is astonishing about Topology is the excellence of the members as both soloists and ensemble players. There are no weak links in the group, and their sense of communion when playing is simply wonderful. This is particularly noticeable in the paired

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relationships between Hoey and Powell on the viola and violin, and the two Davidsons on piano and bass, with Babbage providing a random element, sometimes working with one pair, then the next, then as a soloist. Whilst it is certainly true that Topology perform to expectations, they are *good* expectations to have in the first place, and Brisbane is fortunate to have such a group of talented musicians doing what they do.

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