

LUNCHBREAK CONCERT
In association with:
THE SOUND FESTIVAL 2011
juice VOCAL ENSEMBLE
COWDRAY HALL
Thursday, 10 November 2011

After hearing the astonishing performance by **juice** Vocal Ensemble (they spell their name with all small case letters) I was left struggling for words to describe them. The description at the head of the programme does it better than I ever could so I quote it in full here: “**juice** are an experimental vocal trio who perform an incredible mix of sounds from Central African-inspired riffs to vocal percussion; ethereal harmonies to growly drones. Their unique sound is an avant-garde mix of classical, world music, jazz, pop and folk, weaving a love of the theatrical and unusual word-setting into largely original works and improvisation”. “Right on!” as they say in America – that is what we heard and perhaps even a bit more. There was a near full house for the performance including, at the front, a large contingent of youngsters from St. Joseph’s Primary School who listened intently to the performance; their behaviour was absolutely impeccable and they were a credit to their school. I doubt if at their age, on hearing all those astonishing vocalisations, I could have behaved nearly as well.

There is not a great deal of music written in any format, experimental or otherwise, for three female voices so three of the pieces in Thursday’s programme had been composed by members of the ensemble, Kerry Andrew, Anna Snow and Sarah Dacey and others had been specially written for the group by composer friends.

The recital opened with what perhaps was the most astonishing piece of all, entitled Luna-cy by **juice** member Kerry Andrew. Exhaled (and inhaled) breaths, whoops and hoots and much more made up this extraordinary piece of avant-garde instrumental writing for voices. The inclusion of a brief moment of traditionally sung words came as every bit as much a surprise as the rest.

Shakespeare’s words It Was A Lover and His Lass from As You Like it was first set by Thomas Morley and then by many others including Hollywood composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold but Damien Harron’s version for **juice** must be among the most unusual with most of the poem spoken by each of the girls while the refrain like birdsong was further enhanced by the use of Vietnamese mouth harps (similar to what are called **trumps** in the Aberdeen area).

Dream of you, by Morag Galloway though still advanced in its melodic writing was otherwise more traditional in its vocal delivery. The Seven Star Girls by Anna Snow also a member of the ensemble told a Native American Indian story of seven girls who chased by bears were saved by being flung into heaven by the rock on which they sought refuge and transformed into the seven stars of the Pleiades – an interesting if totally unconnected parallel here with the Greek myth behind the opera La Calisto by Cavalli (bears and star maidens) but ending with similar ethereal singing by female voices.

Heal you, by Anna Meredith was soft and gentle with lovely controlled pianissimo singing while The Cruel Mother, by Sarah Dacey another group member unfolded the folksong narrative with clarity and drama.

Of The Snow by Elizabeth Lutyens was a characteristically atmospheric piece with the voices decorating the principal lines of music with little dabs of notes like snowflakes? Similar dabs of musical colour decorated Never Adore by Mica Levi like droplets of sound.

The Unquiet Grave by Jim Moray was a movingly written folksong narrative. Also narrative but with plenty of black humour was Laurence Roman's Cautionary Verses which employed a motor horn something dropped into a metal bucket to give the effect of a marble bust falling on top of a naughty door-slaming girl and finally a bursting balloon which made the young boy sitting in front of me shoot up with surprise and alarm in his seat.

Hand generated sounds: finger clicking, rubbing and clapping decorated Gabriel Prokofiev's Vue sur la ville Depuis la montagne. Yes, he is the grandson of Sergei and the next composer, Roxanna Panufnik is the daughter of the famous Polish composer. Her piece Faint Praise was a humorous take on woman's' lib ideas of men some of them a bit naughty.

Paul Robinson's Triadic Riddles of Water and Ice had echoes of Steve Reich in its hand clapping and finally Roll in My Sweet Baby's Arms had a touch of pop – country even spiritual inspiration. It was a **juice** arrangement of a piece by Lester Flatt a guitarist best known as the partner of Earl Scruggs, performers of Duelling Banjos and composers of The Ballad of Jed Clampett (a poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed) the signature music to The Beverly Hillbillies; proof surely that the musical range of **juice** covers almost every type of music in existence.

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