

MIGRATION REVIEW

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Review: Migration (Australian String Quartet, Slava Grigoryan)

★★★★☆

A brave and intriguing programme from Slava and the ASQ.

Queensland Conservatorium Theatre

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Migration, a brave and intriguing programme, featured two new works in the first half for String Quartet and Guitar and Schubert's epic String Quartet in G D.887 in the second. The vibe in the Theatre was receptive to the new. First came American Composer Ralph Towner's *Migration* a work in one long movement with a play on the simultaneous use of major and minor harmony, the use of a rhythmical frame of three pitted against another of two and the use of repetition.

Slava Grigoryan was commanding in the stretchy, chatty interchanges with the Quartet. At times, it was as if the guitar was saying, "Yes but..." in response to discursive phrases flaunted by the strings. Grigoryan's command and brilliant execution of the florid solos and relentless, unstoppable drive carried the work.



Dale Barltrop, Francesca Hiew, Slava Grigoryan, Stephen King, Sharon Grigoryan. Photo © Mark Turner

To be fair, the writing favours the guitar but Towner's exploration of the String Quartet's possibilities in tonal variation and virtuosic capacity was less convincing. Overall, the work conveyed a homogenous sound hub enlivened by Grigoryan's sparkling guitar. The final section's exhilarating rush with virtuosic phrases hurled in all directions was the most successful.

It was in Iain Grandage's imaginative *Black Dogs*, a study of depression and mental illness, that the expressive potential of a String Quartet and Guitar collaboration emerged. The guitar, the main voice, represents the human mind and Grigoryan's authoritative communication of tune splinters and jagged rhythms were then subjected to skilled and colourful extension by the Quartet.

With its churning despair from the dizzying, arpeggiated swirls in the first movement, the bleak narrative in the second to the third's agonized *moto perpetuo*, which builds into a tornado of nervy angst, *Black Dogs*, proved an ideal vehicle for the Quintet. The superb airing met with enthusiastic applause.

Over the years, Australian audiences have heard various combinations of players performing as the Australian String Quartet. As a demonstration of this, Stephen King (viola) said that Francesca Hiew (violinist) heard another ASQ team perform Schubert's String Quartet in G in the Conservatorium Theatre when she was a student.

Joking aside, the anecdote revealed the pressure on the current team to create a memorable, distinctive voice and their effort was most apparent in the insightful take on Schubert's late Quartet. Their unity shone in the precision timed silences which hovered for a nano second longer than usual. A telling illustration of what the scholar Carl Dahlhaus referred to about this work as a, 'timelessness in which a musical moment stretches into the immeasurable.'

Schubert's frequent use of tremolos in the first movement were brilliantly executed and assumed a variety of attitudes: conciliatory, dismissive, growled, loving, hopeful. The performance which vividly journeyed through Schubert's searching music, the flickering between light and shade and a pointy terrain of multiple key changes was a stunner.

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