

Welcome Cross Winds

"Winds of the Southern Cross" is the name of the Australian ensemble that appeared at the Kelowna Community Theatre Wednesday evening. Chalk up another success for the good folk at the Kelowna Community Concert Association. Thanks, KCCA, for bringing these awesome Aussies to Kelowna. The Winds... are essentially just that--a wind quartet plus a singer and a pianist. Clarinetist Paul Dean is also the group's leader and his wife Leesa supports him with her fabulous bassoon. Let's not forget their daughter, who turned pages for pianist Kevin Power with professional precision. Peter Luff made his horn behave impeccably, and soprano Margaret Schindler did likewise with her voice.

A late substitution was that of the oboist. Her name unfortunately didn't make it into the printed program, but her playing was sublime.

This is as even and uniformly excellent a group as you're likely to find anywhere. No one stuck out like the proverbial sore thumb. Everyone played with an intensity matched by integrity. It was a memorable treat made all the more sweet by the fact that the Southern Cross Soloists did it all without resorting to amplification.

As you might suspect, works written for the combination of soprano voice, oboe, clarinet, horn, bassoon, and piano are not that common. To get around this problem, two of the group's performers proved themselves to be capable arrangers.

Kevin Power not only impressed with his formidable keyboard technique, he also did the imaginative and colourful arrangement of Snugglepot and Cuddlepie for the Southern Cross Soloists. Snugglepot and Cuddlepie, by the way, are classic Australian cartoon characters, and the piece in which they come to life is a ballet by Richard Mills. For the Zerlina arias from Mozart's Don Giovanni, Power mostly let the wind instruments keep their traditional parts from the orchestra score while playing the string parts on the piano.

Not to be outdone, Clarinetist Paul Dean did the instrumental arrangements for the entire second half of the program. To me, at least, Dean achieved an authentic impressionistic sound for the Ravel numbers. Soprano Margaret Schindler proved herself not just a good vocal technician but also an expressive interpreter of the Five Greek Songs set by Ravel, and particularly of Canteloube's Songs of the Auvergne.

The group made a small program change by dropping the Forlane from Ravel's Le Tombeau de Couperin and replacing it with a George Gershwin medley as the last piece on the program.

To show its appreciation for such stellar music making, the big crowd of subscribers gave the Southern Cross Soloists a standing ovation. As encore, the group returned the favour with the English Music Hall number I'm Tone-Deaf, in which soprano Schindler most definitely proved she's NOT tone-deaf by holding those blatant bloopers until the orchestra managed to get in tune with HER.

Charles Velte is a former opera singer (1962-67) who holds a Master of Music degree in Music Theory from the University of Wisconsin (1961). He now leads a music appreciation group at the Society for Learning in Retirement.