

Soaring Dreams and Visions

***Memories, Hopes and Dreams* presented by Geelong Concert Band, part of the Windfire Festival, Friday March 18, 2022 in St Mary's Basilica.**

This was the fourth concert in the 2022 Windfire Festival and it illustrated the *Memories, Hopes and Dreams* of three Geelong musicians. First, the forward thinking of Frank De Rosso who, 12 years ago, started this idea of a festival of fine music spread around Geelong's churches. He then kept the windfires alight through pandemic lockdowns. Frank's vision was further embellished this year when he commissioned a new work by Geelong composer, Kym Dillon, to close this concert in fine style. But more of that later.

Completing and complementing these two Geelong musical visionaries was the Geelong Concert Band's musical director and conductor, Shannon Ebeling, whose own vision was built on the recognition that churches have excellent acoustics inbuilt into their design. This was originally intended to impress congregations by sending the word of God soaring aloft from preachers and choirs. But in the 21st Century, that architectural device works naturally to conduct ensemble music with beautiful clarity without any electronic amplification. This was neatly illustrated by the concert's first piece, Frank Tichell's *Pacific Fanfare*. For this work, conductor Ebeling took members of his 55-member band – mainly horn and percussion units – and strategically placed them around the Basilica, in transepts and choir stalls (I'm not across all the terminology) in order to send their sounds swirling and sweeping around its high vaulted hardwood ceiling. The work lent itself admirably to this, starting as it did with a solo oboe and building to a crescendo of fanfares. It made for an impressive opening that was expanded by the second piece by Percy Grainger. This 1918 work, *Colonial Song*, was both melodic and intricate, not at all in the composer's usual style of building on folk songs. For this instrumental song, the instruments challenged, complimented and combined to make a series of flowing melodies.

This was followed by another change of style. The aggressive staccato machine-like *Red Machine*, which had been commissioned by London's Coldstream Guards for its band to play when trooping its colours around Buckingham Palace.

Then Geelong's premier band turned to a complete contrast with Eric Whitacre's *Sleep*, a number that required a sung introduction and conclusion. The GCB didn't bring in a vocal ensemble for this – they simply put down their instruments and sang, beautifully and in perfect harmony, before, without missing a beat, lifting their instruments and completing the gently flowing melodies.

This was followed by the bright and cheerful *Festival Prelude* by Alfred Reed which turned out to be the perfect introduction to the evening's final piece.

This was the aforementioned *Veni Creator Spiritus*, Kym Dillon's specially commissioned work. This was, the programme noted, 'a narrative symbol of the creative spirit of people finding their place within the larger story of the world through the creation of and engagement of art.' So suitable for composer, commissioner and band.

The evening's longest work had echoes and intertwining musical references to all of the themes it had followed.

And its own melodies neatly covered and combined all of the memories, hopes and dreams of the concert's title aspirations, too.

So it was entirely appropriate that composer Kym stood with the band to take the

long and warm audience appreciation of her work.
It made a fitting end to a well-chosen concert that showcased the extraordinary skills
– and visions – of some very fine Geelong musicians.
– *Colin Mockett*