

Arts in the Valley: Tafelmusik - Sunday February 7 at 11 am

Nicola Bell (oboe), Melissa Woodrooffe (bassoon), Heather Lindsay (cello), Jonathan Henderson (flute).

Music by Telemann, Vivaldi, WF Bach and Fasch.

'Tafelmusik' is a seventeenth/eighteenth-century name that refers to dinner music for the European ruling class of that era. The music was originally intended as an accompaniment to eating, drinking and a fair amount of chatter. Today, we sometimes call this 'muzak', but the music we heard at this concert is nothing like the meaningless, irrelevant 'musak' of the modern era.

In truth, it was only the first piece on the program that could strictly be called dining room music, coming as it does from a collection of works by Telemann called 'Tafelmusik'. The other pieces, while not intended to be music to accompany dining, are similar in style and each was composed to entertain the ruling class of the day.

I imagine that any of the represented composers, had they been flies on the wall at this concert in our little hall, would have been astonished to witness such a quiet audience listening to their music with obvious rapt attention. Times have changed, as they inevitably do, and music is re-appraised. The best of it is freshly appropriated over and over again by new generations who bring to it their own music-listening requirements and habits.

Listening quietly gives the music the opportunity to be heard in all its detail, and it is well worth the effort. I can't help feeling that the original audiences of kings, archdukes, emperors and all their entourage, missed out on appreciating just how brilliantly written this stuff is. You might think that the composers, knowing that their music would have to compete with talking, socialising and eating, wouldn't have tried so hard; they might have dished up any old thing (excuse the pun). Not them. It is difficult to imagine more finely crafted music. These eighteenth-century composers were at the very top of their game regardless of their intended audience.

The music is also exceptionally difficult to play and requires performers of the highest level of technical ability and dedication to their art. As a performer one is very exposed playing this sort of music and you have to be really good to pull it off (a bit like landing a jet on the Hudson River). On this occasion we were not let down. Highlights of this concert were numerous, so I'll content myself with a few generalisations. **Nicola**: has a delightful sound; a consummate professional oboeist; **Melissa**: astonishingly agile and accurate bassoonist; tosses off the most difficult music with ease and elegance; **Heather**: a beautiful cello tone; her playing is always perfectly judged to balance with her colleagues; **Jonathan**: a highly accomplished flutist; a beautiful tone and fine technique. And these musicians are good at listening to one another; their sense of 'ensemble' - the way each part works in relation to the overall result - is never less than perfect. This concert was a joyful tour de force no matter which way one measured it.

One disturbing thing about weekend concerts of acoustic music in our Community Hall is the regular intrusion of the sound of (literally) dozens of motor bikes cruising up and down Moss Vale Road.

Telemann *et al* may have had to contend with talking and eating but passing traffic and needlessly ineffective mufflers were not a problem in eighteenth-century European courts.

However, these sporadic, noisy intrusions did not appear to dampen the enthusiasm of our audience. After such a lengthy lay off due to COVID-19 restrictions it was wonderful to actually attend a live concert and there was a tangible sense of joy in the hall.

Hats off to Arts in the Valley for putting on such an event without delay as soon as lockdown rules permitted. Nick Minogue and team must have been pleased with the turnout.

Another concert in this little series - this one is called 'Rustiques' and featuring the same artists - is planned for Sunday March 7th. and will be well worth the price of a ticket.

Robert Constable AM

