

What: Voices of Women
Who: The Fringe Festival and the Performing Arts Community Trust
When: Wednesday 6 November 2019
Where: The Gallagher Academy of Performing Arts at the University of Waikato

New Music by: Janet Jennings
Reviewer: Sam Edwards

Only a score or so of chaps in the audience. Some were clearly there at the pleasure of their female minders. A few others were just as clearly aficionados of the joys of vocal and instrumental music. And then there were the curiously expectant. In the moments before the sound would begin, there were bits of gossip, information about the works by the knowledgeable, and a chattering of programmes as others absorbed the useful introductory verbal notes which preceded the musical ones. Into the rustle and mutter crept a sound, oh so quietly, most of us were not conscious of the initial frequencies. Yoshiko Tsuruta, on her banqueting table sized marimba was caressing the keys with a sensitivity reserved for the most precious of artifacts, and setting the tone for a concert which demonstrated a stellar leap in the way composer Jennings was now illuminating the spoken word. The opening work was a new setting of Mary's Magnificat, the hymn of praise attributed to one of the world's best known women. This was no mere display of onomatopaeic matching of instrument and sound image. Over and over the musical score held both the denotative **and** connotative elements of meaning inherent in the spoken word, explicating meaning, illuminating mood, and delivering new understanding of the world in ways which were uniquely entertaining and individually satisfying. It was writing which typified the concert as a whole. The new compositions held the depth top musicians could explore and interpret. The instrumental performers understood both intent and content. The vocal performers demonstrated a rare awareness of the lovely ambiguities of poetic form, and delivered in voices which had the aforementioned chaps clearly, if not surprised, as some were, certainly delighted that they were there. Twelve performers, Rachael Griffiths Hughes conducting the final complex work, and Janet Jennings providing the music to illuminate the poetry, and bells rang. This was an exemplary performance by and of women, full of sound and pleasure, and signifying a future filled with promise.