

Tenebrae et Lux – 2013 Perth International Art Festival

Program notes by Benjamin Bergery:

When I was commissioned by the Perth International Art Festival to create a visual work to accompany the keen voices of Gesualdo's Responsoria sung by St George's Cathedral Consort conducted by Joseph Nolan, my starting place, with their kind consent, was to change the order of the songs they had selected to create a 3-act structure based on the Passion story. I sought to be true to the music's lyrics and liturgical origin.

I imagined the 10 pieces as moments from the Passion story, a series of *tableaux vivants* with stationary or very slow-motion dancers bathed in light rhythms, and I have worked closely with James Berlyn and his 6 dancers to create not scenes from a play, but rather glowing frescoes where the choir also has its place, along with floating words, and a video fragment. The aim is to create a visual polyphony that combines luminous characters, voices and emotions.

The visual narrative is designed to help the audience enter into the inchoate world of luminous rhythms. While the varying lights sometimes represent recognizable rhythms like heartbeats and flames, they can also evoke and elicit amorphous emotions. I decided early on to abandon the idea of synchronicity between light and music, because it is so commonplace and often lacks mystery. Instead, with the help of technology created by my friend and fellow artist Jim Campbell, we are offering compositions of light and color that I hope will serve as a distinct, visual counterpoint to the magical music of Joseph Nolan and his choir.

<http://bergery.net>

Tenebrae et Lux

Excerpts from 3 reviews:

1. William Yeoman – The West Australian:

Bergery has rearranged the order of 10 of Gesualdo's responsories and used subdued lighting effects and video projections to create, in collaboration with Berlyn and a team of dancers including Claudia Alessi and Linton Aberle, "a series of tableaux vivants . . . bathed in light rhythms". In essence, a three-act passion play of sorts evoking the same haunted atmosphere as certain passages in Werner Herzog's film *Gesualdo: Death for Five Voices* and Derek Jarman's strange, semi-fictionalised biopic *Caravaggio*.

The various tableaux, redolent of the chiaroscuro of depositions, pietas and crucifixions and suchlike by Caravaggio, de la Tour, Rubens and Ribera, are as moving as they are simple, the dancers as precise and expressive in their movements and attitudes as the choir and Nolan are in their crisp, vigorous response to Gesualdo's tremulous, passionate response to the biblical texts...

Tenebrae et Lux depends for much of its effect on revelation and surprise. I have therefore left much out. The simplest and best solution is to see it for yourself.

<http://bergery.net>

Tenebrae et Lux

Excerpts from 3 reviews:

2. Melissa Lesnie – Limelight magazine:

It was refreshing to see the arts festival ritual of the “light show” applied on a subtle, small scale, in the intimate surrounds of Winthrop Hall. Rather than fading to black, **Tenebrae et Lux** begins with silence and pitch dark, introducing focused streams and spheres of golden light, as well as sombre, flickering lanterns that reveal the poses of five dancers representing significant moments in the Passion.

St George’s Cathedral Consort don’t shy away from the sensual textures in this stunning a cappella sacred music, making fleetingly illuminated moments like Judas’ kiss all the more powerful. As if dazzled by the flash bulb of an old camera, I was left with these images burned and lingering under my eyelids...

Dancers moved slowly, almost freeze-frame against the light, as if stirring from within a Renaissance painting. Some memorable iconography emerges; the highlight, literally, was a triptych spread as a vector that led diagonally across the hall, the light catching Jesus bearing the load of the cross and, most poignantly, the moment the nails are raised to be hammered into his palms as he lies prostrate on the ground.

Tenebrae et Lux

Excerpts from 3 reviews:

3. Krista Tanuwibawa – Perth Festival Young Ambassador:

Tenebrae et Lux was a performance unlike any I'd ever experienced before... this felt new in the sense that both the visual and musical components were working in synergy, bringing the music to the forefront of the performance, instead of one component merely accompanying the other. It was bold and refreshing...

Lights, strategically placed around Winthrop Hall, recreated scenes from the story, glimmering in rhythms that challenged those of the consort's voices, and were symbolic in their existence and design. Dancers would sometimes hold the lights and moved incredibly slowly (or remained stationary) within their brightness, creating picturesque tableaux vivants of the events outlined in the music's lyrics, with their haunting shadows creeping across the walls of the venue. Bergery was careful not to make any of the visual components too theatrical in ensuring "the choir has its place", as quoted in the program notes, and I think that he was successful in doing so....

Tenebrae et Lux was probably the coolest thing I'd seen I Winthrop Hall since I saw someone scrunch a piece of paper on stage as part of an orchestral piece. This performance opened my eyes to a new way of presenting music and making it relevant to the contemporary audience. Hopefully more musicians in the art music world will stray from traditional performance practices to deliver something that is both exciting to a wider audience while staying true to the character of the music.

<http://bergery.net>