

New Zealand Quartet at Kings Place in London

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The Strad

Flair and joy from the players of the New Zealand Quartet

Tim Homfray, The Strad, London, UK - July 1st, 2012

For a week in March, Kings Place welcomed the spirit of New Zealand, with the New Zealand Quartet taking pride of place. This concert opened with Mendelssohn's Capriccio, given a performance both stern and exhilarating, with clearly delineated contrapuntal lines. It was followed by the UK premiere of Gao Ping's Three poems by Mu Xin, commissioned by the quartet. New Zealand baritone Jonathan Lemalu joined the players for this vivid music, beautifully written and performed, where strings wove around and enveloped the long legato vocal lines before finally ascending to the heavens.

The New Zealand composer Jack Body's Three Transcriptions for string quartet were tremendous fun, the first based on a Chinese Jew's harp piece, busy and heavy on harmonics, the second a pizzicato-laden arrangement of

Madagascan zither music and the third a manic Bulgarian dance, complete with foot stamping, all played with terrific verve and precision. Tan Dun's Eight Colours was similarly precise and colourful, an intricate exploration of the possibilities of string technique and quartet texture. Not all the details were quite as clear in Beethoven's F major Quartet op.18 no.1, but there was firm direction, with passion in the slow movement and a finale full of flair.