

SIGNUM saxophone quartet: Australia Tour 2022

Melbourne Recital Centre 12/11/2022



MUSIC

Signum Saxophone Quartet and Kristian Winther ★★★★★½

Musica Viva, Melbourne Recital Centre, November 12 (returning November 22)

In an intrepid departure from its more traditional chamber music offerings, Musica Viva has brought the German-based Signum Saxophone Quartet to Australia for the first time. Displaying all the hallmarks of true chamber musicians, these saxophonists brought classy enthusiasm to transcriptions of a diverse repertory.



Musica Viva's Australian tour of Signum Saxophone Quartet and Kristian Winther. *SUE GRAHAM*

Within the generous acoustic of Elisabeth Murdoch Hall, the quartet projected a plush sound, to the point where some fine detail in the opening of Bach's *Italian Concerto* was submerged in the resonant sonic wash. The succeeding Andante brought greater clarity; Blaz Kemperle's sensitively moulded soprano saxophone solo taking on an hypnotic quality, not unlike that of a snake charmer's melody, before the bustling Presto overflowed with irrepressible energy.

Australian violinist Kristian Winther proved an ardent advocate for Kurt Weill's Violin Concerto, Op. 12, arranged by Sydney composer Jessica Wells from the original violin and wind orchestra score. Wells' arrangement was commissioned by Musica Viva as part of the Hildegard Project, Australia's first program dedicated to championing the work of women composers. Composed in 1924, the concerto is cast in the spiky modernism of the period and only hints at Weill's subsequent theatrical style. Thanks to the chameleon-like quality of the saxophone, listeners could well imagine the vibrant timbres of the original. Winther's impressive grasp of Weill's technical and expressive complexities was reinforced by agile, empathetic ensemble.

As expected, the quartet excelled in the jazz idiom, bringing plenty of sensuality to Gershwin's *Three Preludes*. An arrangement of the Symphonic Dances from Bernstein's *West Side Story* allowed all four players solo opportunities; Jacopo Taddei's alto embracing the longing of *Somewhere*, Alan Luzar's tenor underlining the wit of *I Feel Pretty* and Guerino Bellarosa's baritone driving the sassy rhythms of *Mambo*.

An ecstatic account of Chick Corea's *Spain* brought this unusual musical journey to an exhilarating close.

Reviewed by Tony Way