

JOUISSANCE

Reviewer: Zsuzsi Soboslay

Words: 400

In a Festival crowded with many pleasures and of such huge range, one of the highlights would have to be the delicate, intimate, harrowing and joyous concert by Jouissance on Sunday afternoon.

Comprised of 5 performers—soprano, bass, double bass, percussion, and shakuhachi [Japanese flute], Jouissance creates dialogue between ancient chant and contemporary culture. In the 2007 Festival, they performed works by Hildegard of Bingen; this year, the focus was Kassia, the first female composer whose scores are both extant and able to be interpreted by modern scholars and musicians.

Like Bingen, Kassia was sequestered in a convent, but also like Bingen, her writing is full of passion and sensuality. Some of her compositions are still performed today as part of Orthodox service.

The special skill of Jouissance, however, is that the group *interacts with*, rather than replicates, early work. Artistic director Nick Tsiavos says that post-modern theory, which he read in the eighties, was good to leave behind, but nonetheless made him think about contexts: what era we live in, what our own ears and experiences bring to any interpretation.

The result is an extraordinary performance philosophy that sees the 5 performers working within historical frameworks, but stretching interpretation to allow the influence of contemporary *zeitgeist*.

Thus, Tsiavos's double bass sometimes breaks with jazz-influenced riffs; Peter Neville's playing of contemporary, Melbourne-made, conical 'Ausbells' and simple, hung pieces of sheet metal, carry medieval resonance but allow an even deeper exploration of contemporary mood. It can bring Anne Norman's generous, elastically expressive shakuhachi into the fold [this is Byzantium via Japan], and perhaps most significantly, Deborah Kayser's gorgeous voice can break and dive and flutter in an extraordinary exploration of, and improvisation around, the deeper emotions of the text. At certain moments, I am quite sure Kaiser's body has become a shakuhachi, mimicking its tonalities and technique [tonguing, fluttering, shaking], her feet jumping from the ground by force of her emotions. This body and voice become the temple of Kassia's prayers.

Complemented by Jerzy Kozlowsky's gloriously compassionate bass, and Tsiavos' demeanour of a Coptic priest, one is truly held within sacred ground.

Jouissance have a very passionate following for their work, with a growing audience. I always feel it a privilege to hear them perform.

Jouissance

Artistic Director/double bass: Nick Tsiavos; Soprano: Deborah Kayser; Bass: Jerzy

Kozlowsky; Percussion: Peter Neville; Shakuhachi: Anne Norman..

Canberra International Chamber Music Festival,

Sunday May 23, Fitter's Workshop, Kingston, 2.30pm.