

## REVIEW - *Barrier Reef Orchestra Goes to the Opera 22 October 2016*

In keeping with the title of the recital there was the sprinkling of bling and suits on show in the foyer and bar at the Civic Theatre prior to the orchestra's last concert for 2016. The audience numbered almost 500, including a good turnout of children for an evening performance. It was especially pleasing to see our new patron, Mr Bill Tweddell (Chancellor James Cook University) and his wife Chris, as part of the audience.



*BRO Goes to the Opera* proved to be the perfect night's entertainment with a mix of classic opera and excerpts from 20<sup>th</sup> century stage musical hits. Again this city shone as a home ground of performance talent, when our celebrated orchestra performed under the baton of guest conductor Craig Johnson, in the company of local award-

winning lyric soprano Siobhan Patrick and leading man of many Townsville musical roles, tenor, Alex Thomas.



A real kickstart to the program came with the orchestra's rendition of the *Overture to Verdi's La forza Del destino*, the "cursed" opera (superstition comes easy in the slightly crazy world of the performing arts). This opening piece, delivered with dazzle and prodigious accomplishment, prepared the audience for a night of musical glamour.

Both guest vocalists sang their introductory opera pieces (respectively of Bellini and Donizetti) with bold and polished delivery; Siobhan resplendently frocked as one would expect of a Vienna performance: bravo the green and glitter. She wore it with elegance. And yes: formal black tie and a handsome tenor enhances the pleasure of a night at the opera especially when one of the great arias, *Una furtive lagrima*, is delivered in a smooth and accomplished manner with a restrained orchestral accompaniment. Here the audience showed indisputable pleasure with generous applause.

Khachaturian's adagio from *Spartacus* was given the majestic treatment those familiar with the piece had expected. For many of us the melody will long be associated with that shot of the graceful sailing ship introducing each episode of The Onedin Line. Whatever the

association, ballet or TV, the orchestra's lavish interpretation won audience approval.

Opening the second part of the concert the orchestra brought to life the *Overture to The Barber of Seville*; such a blast from the past for many of us who remember the Bugs Bunny interpretation (*Come into my shop, let me cut your mop*). However, such recollections were cast aside when Alex reprised his Jean Valjean of *Les Mis* with the moving "Bring Him Home" (yes, a quick dive into the purse for a hanky for that one). Siobhan's wardrobe change for the second part brought forth a new twist on the classic black number along with her change of pace into the familiar Lehár "*Mein Lippen, sie küssen so heiß*". This is definitely where the surtitles came to the fore (to praise those fiery kisses).

The great *Overture to West Side Story* was given a masterly and rousing interpretation by the orchestra and the tender-hearted "*Tonight*" from that same musical sung by Siobhan and Alex brought some of that Bernstein energy to the concluding concert. Both singers and orchestra were worthy of the great applause they drew. Such a great night for the Townsville audience: a sensational concert delivered by our own talented performers and an enthusiastic guest conductor.

After a concert that truly bridged the gap between classical and popular music and wowed its audience by ticking all the boxes for a night of entertainment excellence, all that could remain was Party Time. On this occasion that party was under the stars in the courtyard of the theatre where a late night supper brought artists, players, and concert subscribers together to bask in the triumph of another stupendous BRO outing. Further cause for celebration that night was the presentation to **Daniel Hardy (Horn)** and **Elena James (Violin)** of this year's **Encouragement Awards**. The future of the orchestra is assured in the hands of such outstanding young musicians. We wish them well but also rejoice in our present dynamic Barrier Reef Orchestra which has rapidly established itself as a steadfast entity in the Townsville performing arts and entertainment landscape. *Billie Saint-Rang*

**The Barrier Reef Orchestra Committee would like to acknowledge the sponsorship received from *Mango Tree Books* and *Bamford Medical* towards Siobhan Patrick's expenses—thank you.**