

## British violinists bring their expertise to assist young New Zealand musicians



The title of tonight's Pettman National Junior Academy concert is an inviting one - *Transfigured Night* - the translation of *Verklärte Nacht*, the lush string orchestra score that made the name of Arnold Schoenberg just a few years into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There's no need for a dissonance alert as this music is so sumptuously romantic it could be described as the love child of Wagner and Brahms. Along with a Chamber Symphony transcribed from Shostakovich's popular Eighth String Quartet and a set of Dvorak Waltzes, it is on the bill when the Academy plays at Auckland Art Gallery tonight.

These young string players represent the cream of New Zealand's musical talent and will be on top form after 10 days of intensive training with leading British violinists Clio Gould and Jonathan Morton.

When I visited rehearsal rooms last weekend, Gould was working with a circle of violinists on Schoenberg's soaring lines while husband Morton led a quartet through a Chausson concerto.

Both have expertise that reflects their status in the music world. Morton is concert-master of London Sinfonietta, an ensemble that, since the late 1960s, has championed the new and explorative. The affable Englishman enjoys „being part of the constantly changing and evolving world of new music, especially over the last few years.

"It's so much more eclectic," he says. "It's like all these different currents of activity have exploded, making all these different scenes."

He talks of fascinating projects with the likes of avant-garde American composer Christian Marclay and working with his own Scottish Ensemble alongside Swedish choreographer Orjan Andersson in a presentation of Bach's Goldberg Variations that has been successful on the European circuit.

"I like being thrown into unexpected situations and having to come up with something that's not routine and not necessarily what you've been trained for" he explains.

Sometimes it's good to be thrown in the deep end, as students so often are, facing new challenges, he laughs.

"Here in Auckland, I feel it's a similar situation. There's not the same feeling of them-and-us, on different sides of a barrier."

Gould joins us, having spent a few extra minutes with her young charges. She's enjoying her first visit to New Zealand, after recently relinquishing Concertmaster duties with the London-based Royal Philharmonic Orchestra after 13 years.

"You need more time now with the children growing up," she explains. "Unfortunately you can't make an orchestra fit around your own life. Now I have the space for more projects that I want to do."

Although such projects are often on the contemporary side, one of her fondest memories is taking the solos in Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade in a 2011 recording with the RPO under Charles Dutoit. "It's such an exquisitely written solo part, with so much drama," she sighs. "You do your solo bits and then there's that enormous swell of orchestral support around you."

She admits the *Transfigured Night* programme is ambitious.

"We couldn't have found a more demanding piece than the Schoenberg," she says. "However the students are wonderfully prepared for what will be an intense period of rehearsal. This is such a valuable experience for them, especially as so much of it is up to them, working as a team. Jonathan and I will be playing as well but we won't be spoon-feeding them." "With no conductor, it will be totally up to the musicians to set a new tempo whenever it's needed."

And this is an experience that's not always possible in a professional orchestra under the rule of a baton, Morton points out.

"This is the place to mix things up," he points out. "It's a great way to give young musicians a voice and an opportunity they would not have otherwise had."



**REPORT:**  
**CLIO GOULD &  
JONATHAN MORTON MASTERCLASS**  
with the PNJA Chamber Orchestra  
**Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> April**

# CLIO GOULD & JONATHAN MASTERCLASS with the Pettman National Junior Academy of Music Chamber Orchestra

On Tuesday the 19<sup>th</sup> April, Clio Gould and Jonathan Morton led an intense three hour masterclass in the University of Auckland school of music theatre. Stephen Larsen was present as an observer and kept a close eye on the violin section, while Edith Salzmann led the cello section.

It was fascinating to sit in the rehearsal and observe the way Clio and Jonathan guided a total of 17 string students (all alumni members of the Pettman National Junior Academy of Music) through the work 'Chamber Symphony in c minor, Op. 110a' by Dimitri Shostakovich (1906-1975). This was one of three major works in which the ensemble would perform in just a few days time at the concert 'Transfigured Nights'.

As an introduction, Clio Gould explained that she would take the lead, whilst Jonathan would take a step back in order to immerse himself in the music of Shostakovich. However, it soon became clear that it was co-led between Clio and Jonathan who worked as a perfect team, taking turns to give advice at the appropriate moments and bouncing off each other's main ideas. For example, Clio began the class by explaining the direction she wished to take the students in before leading the ensemble into a 'read through'. Once the ensemble reached their first 'bump', Clio and Jonathan broke down the problems with a helpful solution.

Throughout the rest of the class, Clio and Jonathan gave an endless supply of ideas on style, colour and rhythm, in order to inspire the students to strive towards a better interpretation of the heavy work. The students sat in silence with utmost respect, listening to every golden word offered to them. They responded by playing back the music exactly as instructed, as one perfectly unified ensemble. The way the students handled themselves in such a professional manner was admirable.

In terms of style, Clio explained to the students that they needed to show an impression of an 'evil waltz', with a strained sound that was relentless in tension. Jonathan also explained that the piece was written in Russia at a time where 'machinery' had arisen as a main field of work. He explained that they needed to imagine big strong men with machinery in the background, or the 'gritty' sound of the moving machinery. The students were told to rise to the challenge in particular areas of the piece that required a much more violent sound.

At a particularly repetitive section, the students were encouraged by Jonathan to sound like, "a person losing their marbles", with the continuous cycle of a rhythmic section that pushed forward in intensity. The ensemble was given technical guidance on how to achieve this tension by using full force whilst plucking their strings. It was quite funny watching students in pain as they gave everything in order to give the required 'tones of energy'. Clio even said "...It's really painful, but it doesn't matter because it won't last long."

At another stage in the piece, the violas were complimented on their great sound. However due to the large amount of cellists in the ensemble, they were encouraged to give even more, so that their crucial parts were not overtaken by the cellists. The violinists were also told how crucial it was to bring out their solo during a transition in the music, making sure to not shy away from it.

In other areas of the piece, Clio made sure to explain the more subtle contrasting sections that sounded more 'jazzy and insidious



'snake like' passages. This helped the students to really bring out the large array of exciting moments in the music.

A particular stylistic element that was interesting to observe, was the way in which Jonathan understood that the students may not have necessarily agreed with his lack of vibrato. He explained that if they were too bored with the lack of vibrato and absolutely disliked it, he was willing to incorporate some vibrato back into the work. However, he did mention that if vibrato was used, it would feel like committing a crime in terms of the style of music and that it should only be used of utmost necessity (if they found they simply couldn't add any more intensity to the music). This was an interesting teaching style, as Jonathan didn't make the students feel forced to play according to his particular style, but gave them a valid reason for his decision and why they should be cautious before going in their own direction.

In terms of colour, Clio and Jonathan explained, 'The less we sound like string instruments and more like machines, the better'. Therefore, they instructed the students to create a 'drier' sound through their use of the bow, which would help the hairs of the bow to be heard on the string within every stroke (as opposed to a 'clean lyrical' sound). In order to create a more 'dirty' colour and much louder dynamic, Jonathan showed the students a special technique, usually avoided in classical training. The students all imitated the technique of bowing in a rather 'rustic' manner and created an impressive sound which was far more menacing. At another point they were guided into using extremely slow bowing, in order to create a sound that was more 'evil' and resistant to relaxing.

When discussing rhythm, Clio and Jonathan were adamant that the students would understand how crucial it was to count in time (especially on the unexpected rests), to which they both gave examples on their personal approaches of counting in a stable manner, when playing such a complex piece of music. Clio and Jonathan emphasized how important it was to stay in absolute control instead of racing through the beats. As a solution, they suggested that the students played almost 'behind the beat' in order to stay in time.

The complex rhythms were rehearsed and pulled apart in the utmost detail, especially the rhythms which required the students to play off the beat whilst sounding as 'mechanical' as possible. As a result of their work, the ensemble created the desired effect of heavy machinery 'grinding' along, with all of its complexities, sheer volume and potential danger.

Overall, the masterclass was absolutely fascinating to observe, due to the amount of information that Clio and Jonathan shared with the students within only three hours of their time. The students adapted very quickly to the instructions and the sound produced between the professionals and students was absolutely stunning.

The concert 'Transfigured Night' (which was held on the evening of Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April at the Auckland Arts Gallery) was very exciting to witness, as a final product of the students' work. Clio and Jonathan performed with the Pettman Chamber Orchestra, along with Edith Salzmann, cello and Evgenyi Lantchikoff, bass. The programme included works by Dvořák, Shostakovich and Schönberg.