

Review: Clarinet Music of Brahms at UKARIA

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Clarinet player David Griffiths. Picture: Supplied

Do you like Brahms? This pick-up line (it sounds better in French), from a novel by Françoise Sagan and its film adaptation, was answered in the affirmative by the audience.

They were seduced by the highly expressive sound of David Griffiths' clarinet as he worked his way through the complete clarinet music of Brahms in two concerts on the same day.

It was a demanding task for Griffiths, who occasionally turned red in the face or could be heard gasping for breath between phrases, none of which affected his playing in the least.

His success was not just one of endurance. He showed a remarkable affinity for the autumnal beauty and emotional range of these remarkable pieces.

The greatest work of all – the Quintet for Clarinet and Strings – came at the end. Griffiths and the Australian String Quartet were a wonderful match in this music that is both passionate and contemplative, elegiac yet hopeful.

Somehow it seemed peculiarly suited for the times we are living through.



Clarinet player David Griffiths. Picture: Supplied

The slow movement is one of Brahms' most remarkable inspirations; anxious, arabesque interjections, beautifully rendered by Griffith, were offset against the muted intensity of the quartet.

Earlier in the day we heard the Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano. It may not quite equal the Quintet in emotional range, but there is much to admire in it.

Interaction of the three instruments is like a lively, if rather serious, conversation between friends.

The conversational aspect of the work shone through in this performance by Griffiths with Svetlana Bogosavljevic (cello) and Timothy Young (piano).

Griffiths and Young paired up in the two Sonatas for Clarinet and Piano, pieces that have been hijacked (with the collusion of Brahms) by violists, but ultimately sound best as originally conceived.

These pieces are intended as a partnership of musical equals and that is how Griffiths and Young approached them.

This was a richly rewarding day of music, with honours going to the performers and particularly David Griffiths, but ultimately to Brahms. Yes, we do like Brahms.