New Ancient Songs
Classical Music / Australia and Europe
UKARIA Cultural Centre
March 10

With a sixteen-musician ensemble from different backgrounds and sixteen musical numbers in contrasting genres, this program seemed to promise much with possible sparks flying as cultural and stylistic traditions met head on. But the result was surprisingly tame, even cosy, with swathes of immersive contemplation and not a little navel gazing.

Even Peter Sculthorpe was only represented by two charming vignettes Little Serenade and Looking Back, both slightly sentimental and perhaps sugar coated. It was the same story with John Rodgers’ Carolling 3, Hollis Taylor’s Night Shift, Ella Macens’ The Lake, Erkki Veltheim’s Ingress and A Faraway Landscape (at dusk).

Too much stasis and too little action.

Energy and edgy angles had to be sought out in unexpected places. Brett Dean’s argumentative and waspish Intimate Decisions for solo viola took flight in a tour de force from Caroline Henbest and the irrepressible Kirsty McCahon played up Hollis Taylor’s skittish Banana Paper for all it was worth.

Unsurprisingly vocalists Emily Wurramara and Alice Skye, whose songs include strong indigenous elements, gave listeners the greatest contrast albeit in a gentle and almost self-effacing manner.

There was no raw emotion here, but Emily Wurramara’s Ngerraberrakernama and Alice Skye’s You are The Mountains contained memorable, touching moments with catchy tunes nicely arranged by Erkki Veltheim.
- Rodney Smith