

Pianist hits the right note with locals

Emerging Auckland musicians took to the stage with a visiting Belgian pianist and a Polynesian group to show how different cultures can create magic.

International classical crossover pianist and composer Daniel Verstappen performed at the Auckland Town Hall Concert Chamber last month, presenting works from his latest album, *Reconnection*.

Almost stealing the show was The Musika Collective, a Polynesian musical hotspot directed by Dr Matatamua Opeloge Ah Sam. Verstappen accompanied the 12-strong choir as they sang waiata and compositions by Dr Ah Sam. Musika Collective singer, Saia Folau, lifted the Concert Chamber roof off with his vocal solo in *Matagofie* (Smile), while his female colleagues danced a graceful 3-hand Siva.

The Belgian pianist also shared the Concert Chamber stage with seven of Auckland's emerging string players.

Together with violinists Zy Guan, Angie Park, Archie Lamont-Bowden, Jiwon Kwon, violist Irene Kim, cellist Max Chen, and bassist Feiyang Wu, he performed *From the Heart* – a powerful original composition.

Onehunga High School student Peter Muller joined Verstappen to perform *Floating*, a piece Daniel wrote for four hands.

Verstappen believes this kind of collaboration lines up with the main theme of *The Reconnection World Tour*, which is a "Bridge Between Cultures".

"The Auckland concert was always intended to be bigger, a real spectacle," Verstappen said.

"The Concert Chamber is a beautiful room, and has excellent acoustics. The Auckland Live staff and tech team were so easy to work with, and added little touches like different lighting for each composition. Performing with The Musika Collec-



Daniel Verstappen on stage with The Musika Collective, a Polynesian musical group directed by Dr Matatamua Opeloge Ah Sam.

tive, and sharing my works with those of Dr Ah Sam really brought to life the 'bridge across cultures'.

Tamaki Makaurau Pā Puoro (Auckland UNESCO City of Music) director Mark Roach shares this enthusiasm for bringing cultures together. "Music is an incredible medium for bridging language and cultural differences," Roach said. "We were delighted to assist Daniel with bringing his concert to Auckland; and the blend of his own compositions and classic European compositions with the Pasifika talents

of Musika Collective as well as the young, emerging talent who also joined Daniel and Beth on stage was a moving and powerful experience."

Performing alongside Verstappen was British violinist Beth Georgiou, a composer, producer and accomplished multi-instrumentalist based in Belgium who studied violin, saxophone and piano, at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music in London.

The concert was part of the Belgian artist's *Reconnection World Tour*, with concerts in New Zealand supported by the Bel-

gian Embassy, Flanders, Sabam for Culture, Gallagher Animal Management, Auckland UNESCO City of Music, and classical musician-promoter Joe Harrop.

Verstappen has performed with some world-famous artists, including Andrea Bocelli, Ennio Morricone, Anastacia, Amy MacDonald, Wyclef Jean, Angie Stone, and Chaka Khan. His musical ambassadorship has also caught royal attention. In 2022, he performed at the World Expo in Dubai in the presence of the Belgian King Philippe and Queen Mathilde.

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