

Arts Arts Reviews Music Music Reviews

Mirabilis Collective launch Illuminate series with Shimmer at Wigmore Studio featuring female artists & music



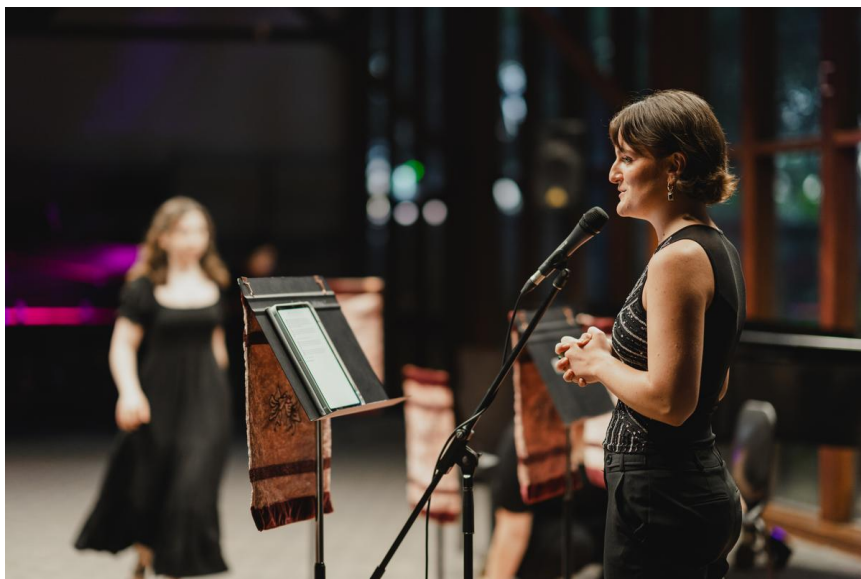
David Cusworth The West Australian
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David Cusworth

Shimmer, by Heather Schmidt, was the title piece of Mirabilis Collective's season opener at UWA's Wigmore Hall on Sunday.

Scintillating piano (Stephanie Nicholls) drew in narrator Ellen Ebbs who spoke of "the enduring spirit that shimmers across time and cultures", launching a year-long series, Illuminate, with piano continuing through acknowledgement of country.

The all-female group, performing all-female composers, revolves around Nicholls and her daughters, violinist Julia - who co-wrote the narration and arrangements with her mother - and soprano Lucinda, with co-founder and flautist Tresna Stampalia.



Narrator Ellen Ebbs. Photographer Tallulah Chong

The tempo lifted for Missy Higgins' Steer, inspired by North West starlight, as the versatile soprano channelled the pop singer-songwriter, with pulsing piano overlaid by violin (Julia Nicholls), cello (Elena Wittkuhn) and flute (Stampalia).

Bridget Hutchinson joined on piano for Cecile Chaminade's Serenade aux Etoiles (Serenade to the Stars), in gracefully energetic chamber music for full ensemble.

Agile pizzicato and piano offset a vital flute lead, throwing to violin before cascading piano reset for a cool conclusion.

Early music strains introduced Settima Caccini's *Due luci ridante* (Two laughing stars); an almost folkloric lilt in the accompaniment leading out a more operatic solo voice. Lucinda Nicholls explored a different sound palette, her warm poppy vowels transformed by crystalline diction echoed in Stephanie Nicholls' oboe continuo over rich strings; sparse harmonies a perfect foil for radiant, laser-like focus in voice.

Home, by WA's Candice Susnjar, was the world premiere of "a musical journey that begins and ends with a single shimmering light".



Mirabilis Collective co-founders Tresna Stampalia and Stephanie Nicholls.
Photographer Tallulah Chong

That light tolled out in a piano monotone, drawing a single phrase from soprano - "a traveller in distant lands" - echoed in violin and evolving in tone with full ensemble as cor anglais (Stephanie Nicholls) bolstered the mid-range supporting cello and flute in turn. Each player took up the narrative, singly then in combination, and the call of home tolled again in piano; the composer taking a bow at the end.

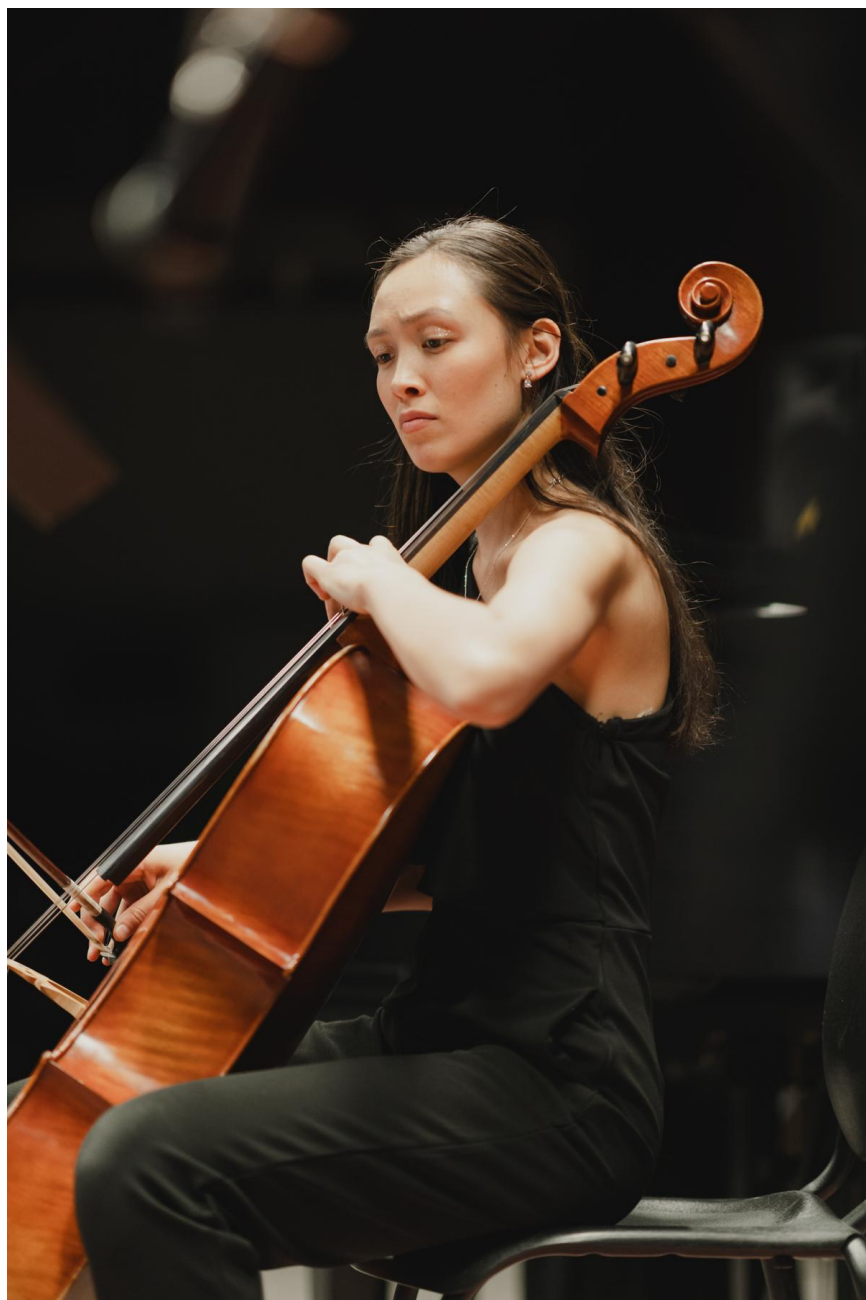
Fellow WA composer Rebecca Erin's *Intrepid: Passage to Antarctica* evoked a shimmer of ice and snow; young artists Elouise Watson (violin) and Jessica Casey (viola), joining Julia Nicholls and Elena Wittkuhn in quartet. Bright

nautical energy gave way to convoluted atmospherics as if surveilling a vast polar wilderness; wide-eyed glances across the foursome anchoring tight coordination for an airy ambience and boisterous conclusion.

Anne Boyd's *Goldfish Through Summer Rain* captured the glimmer of a fish in water; the shimmer of the titular work recalled by piano to introduce golden-toned flute invoking intrigue in intervals and intonation. Each artist found a spare, metallic texture in the music; a crystalline lattice of sound.

Gina Williams' Noongar language *Kalyakoorl (Forever)*, arranged by Julia Nicholls, presented landscape in time and space.

Dense and mournful harmonies built like a dawn chorus, breaking to lyricism for soprano to intone Noongar verse in characteristic rhythm, with a bucolic air in accompaniment and continuo.



Cellist Elena Wittkuhn. Photographer Tallulah Chong

The finale of Geraldine Green's *Trio for Flute, Violin and Piano* opened with a hint of classical-jazz fusion that seemed to leap off the page, perhaps reflecting the composer's film experience.

Offbeat piano chords and rich melody in violin and flute cooled to a ballad in flute over gently rumbling piano, then passed the lead around the trio.

Breaking again to a rumbustious rhythm, a panoramic sweep emerged in grandiose phrases before returning to the whimsy of the opening.

Finally, Sia's anthemic Chandelier seemed to swing from the eponymous, shimmering light source in a quintet arranged by Stephanie Nicholls.

Cello soundboard percussion with violin pizzicato and fragments from piano and woodwind suddenly opened out in perspective and expression. Solo oboe became a duet with violin then a quartet with cello and flute before piano chimed in to swell the theme towards a sudden, surprising cadence.

Mirabilis next presents Solace in the City, on May 31, 7.30pm, at Wesley Church, Perth.

The Illuminate series resumes with Luminous, on June 16, 5pm, at UWA's Callaway Music Auditorium; and Glow, on August 25, 5pm, again at the Callaway.

Finally, Mirabilis return to Wigmore Studio on December 1, 5pm, for Shine.

Tickets: mirabiliscollective.com.
