

The People's Passion

Review by David Pereira

Glenda Cloughley's heartfelt *The People's Passion* was performed to a full house at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in Canberra on November 11 2018. Her original music and words (whether in poetry or prose) were performed by A Chorus of Women, with vocal soloists, a speaker, children's choir, and a small orchestra, all directed with exceptional commitment and ability by Johanna McBride. I'm glad to have attended. And saddened.

"An inspirational story for Peace on Earth now on the centenary of the WW1 Armistice" – can't help focussing one's attention both on hope and on tragedy. When late in the piece I might have joined many in the audience by raising my voice in hope, I found my heart not quite in it. That was not to blame the *Passion*. It had warmed and invigorated my heart over and over. It was to blame only the Human Condition that always was, and still must be (evidently), spoiled by War. Oh, and the disquieting things that a man experiences when reminded of his sex's contributions to failed diplomacy, egomaniacal acquisitiveness, pseudo-philosophic defence of criminality, ingenuity of weapon design and application... and to martyrdom.

Equally I found myself immersed in the barely-told story of women's magnificent work to maintain or restore peace in the context of WW I. On-screen pictures and quotations were very helpful in this regard. I found myself drowning once again in the unfathomable enigma of women's agency when it comes to war.

These matters eclipse but also justify the artistic ones at hand. Naturally, individual musical performance skill levels were diverse, and this enhanced the intense communal aspects of the *People's Passion* experience. Cloughley's music is memorably tuneful and appealingly harmonic, her words persuasive. It gently perambulates by means of short numbers that bring mostly subtle alterations of emotion and content. Some of these could be little 'hit' numbers, given the right circumstances. I marvelled at the synthetic success of this long-prepared performance that must have used such tiny financial resources.

Most of all I am bound to report that this experience has mattered so much in my life. I explain this by reasoning that it mattered so much to those who made it... with passion, with intelligence, and with impeccable motivation.

The People's Passion retells for our time the story of women's voices for peace and the nurture of life during WWI, including the International Congress of Women in 1915 in The Hague, the only peace conference of the war. Soloists were Louise Page, A J America, Jenny Sawyer, Maartje Sevenster and Julia Wee. The work will be performed again on 28 and 30 June 2019 for the centenary of the signing of the Peace Treaty of Versailles.

David Pereira is an eminent Australian cellist and composer.

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