WILLIAM AND HIS DIDGERIDOO BIG WINNERS IN BEIJING

Indigenous virtuoso William Barton proved the crowd favourite with his robust didgeridoo performances during two landmark concerts by an Australian ensemble in Beijing on the weekend.

The Mount Isa born and Brisbane-based musician left audiences “spellbound” as the ensemble from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music played a suite of old and new compositions as part of the pre-Olympic Games cultural festival titled Musicathlon.

The Conservatorium was one of only nine international institutions and two host conservatoriums taking part in the cultural event.

“William was a massive hit, especially with young people in the audience,” said Conservatorium International Development Manager, Elaine Chia.

“Both concerts by the ensemble were very well received, but the loudest applause definitely went to William. For many in the audience it was the first time they had heard a didgeridoo played in person, let alone as part of classical and contemporary works.”

The Australians played a four-tiered Australian program spanning European Baroque, Opera, contemporary string quartet and Indigenous sounds. The new works included compositions by Australians Peter Sculthorpe, Stephen Yates, Carl Vine, Elena Kats-Chernin and Barton himself.

The finale was especially composed by Stephen Yates for Musicathlon, and brought together Neal Peres Da Costa (harpsichord), Elizabeth Gormley (violin), Heather Lindsay (cello), David Papp (oboe), Sonja Schebeck (violin), Luke Spicer (viola), Caroline Wenborne (soprano), Kim Walker (bassoon) and Barton.

Other institutions participating in Musicathlon included the Royal Academy of Music (London), Liszt Academy (Budapest), Korean National University of the Arts, The Juilliard School (New York), the Beethoven Institute (Vienna), Sibelius Academy (Helsinki) and the Universitat Mozarteum Salzburg.

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