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## *LIVE REVIEW // Mark sees Blind Trust (sort of)*

*BLINDFOLDS WITH THE SYDNEY ART QUARTET*

🕒 **October 16, 2018** 📁 **Reviews**



BY MARK BOSCH

**Blind Trust****Sydney Art Quartet with Erin Helyard (harpichord and pianoforte)****The Yellow House, 10 October**

The Yellow House interior feels at once intimate and spacious. The gallery can only hold about 60 people at a pinch, but the central skylight makes it feel like much more. On each wall there are small, square canvases thick with paint; indulgent studies in texture. Although I don't look at them too closely, I feel their presence energises the centre of the space significantly.

Amid the pre-concert chatter, I sit down in the front row, picking up the **blindfold, one of which had been left for each audience member**. Its soft fabric is soothing to the touch — *but I don't put it on*. That's because I'm reading the beautiful little program, designed by **elkemo** and printed on rough paper, almost like the paper one uses for watercolour painting.

Later on, in the interval, I am teased outdoors by the culinary scents of Yellow Restaurant next door. I sit down on the empty restaurant terrace, near other concertgoers who've spilled out onto the footpath, all imbibing our complimentary glasses of wine and champagne. Post-shower Macleay St shimmers, the abutting London planetrees sway. It's just divine! One of the restaurant's waitresses comes out and tells me I'm not allowed to sit on the terrace. *Ooh la la!*

I'm speaking like an idiotic sensualist because there was definitely an element of humour to Blind Trust. Wearing a blindfold doesn't just bring to mind party games and pleasure, but stereotypes of aristocratic decadence, "**intrigue, and masquerade**". People of privilege have always loved exploring the pleasurable possibilities of the five senses, but even those without the time and money and social capital still chase novel sensory experiences. It's just the pleasure principle. We are all

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"...underlying the process is a foundation of deep listening, respect, trust, openness, and the shared goal of connection with each other and with our audience." — Karen Ouzounian

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Oct 18, 2018

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The baritone says this is i  
you should admire.

hedonists, all aesthetes, in one way or another.



The Sydney Art Quartet is all about producing “**intimate, multisensory works**” in the Yellow House, having worked with painters, perfumiers, floral curators, actors (i.e. David Wenham), dancers... their next concert looks like it will include a degustation menu of sorts from Brent Savage, *Good Food Guide's* Chef of the Year 2015. *Ooh la la* indeed.

It's pretty tasty stuff, no doubt. Blind Trust was an enormously satisfying triptych of 18th Century concerti: Dall'Abaco's *Concerto à più strumenti* Op. 6, No. 4 in B Minor, Bach's Keyboard Concerto in D Minor BWV 1052, and Mozart's Fortepiano Concerto No. 14 in E flat, K 449. The quartet approached all three with impeccable style, and it was a joy being so close to musicians whose eyes

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### SO, THIS LOOKS PRETTY COOL

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were regularly meeting, who were smiling, connecting, welcoming the audience into their intimate soundworld. I was lucky to have nabbed the perfect seat: front row, all musicians' faces visible. Some of the audience were seated directly — only centimetres — behind violinist Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba and violist Charlotte Fetherston. I imagine that would've made for quite a different experience – that is, if you weren't using your blindfold. At any given point in the program, my estimate is that half of the audience wasn't. I only used mine during the Bach, simply because I really, really just wanted to watch the lovely musicians.

The only drawback of my position in the audience was that I couldn't see Erin Helyard's fingers moving on the keyboard. The harpsichordist, fortepianist, conductor, scholar, Helpmann Award-winner no doubt stole the show with his expressive, extraordinarily fluid playing, even in the noodliest passages of the Bach. (In fact, he called Bach's devilish solo writing "such Protestant music", and explained it as such: "Paradise awaits, but only if you work very, very hard for it.")



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If Helyard was working hard for it, I didn't notice. His effortless playing put all the audience in paradise, evidenced by a standing ovation that should surely have provoked an encore. Everybody wanted it! But gluttony, that cardinal sin, doth put all heaven in a rage.

The ticket prices were a bit sinful, too. Helen Argiris, one of the quartet's board members, told the all-too-common narrative of "no government funding", which, along with the extra expenses incurred by free refreshments and interdisciplinary experiments (plus free blindfolds), probably justifies the \$80-90 price range.

Still, it was a shame being *almost certainly* the second-youngest in the crowd (second only because somebody brought their young daughter), and one of the few men not in a suit. The stares do get a bit alienating. But the quartet's beautifully interpreted program filled my soul right back up, very much dissolving my anxieties in a crowd I'm certainly no stranger to as a classical music concertgoer, but will never, ever feel at home in.

But that's no note to end on. Instead, I'll reaffirm my complete and utter admiration for what Helyard and the Sydney Art Quartet have done with this program. It's exquisite stuff.

Kudos to all.



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*Images supplied.*

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