

Report of 12 March 2016 Meeting

Royal Society

Southern Highlands Branch

Special Event: An afternoon with Chopin and George Sand

The March 2016 meeting of the Royal Society Southern Highlands Branch(RSSH) took place on the afternoon of Saturday 12 March, instead of at the usual time of 6.30pm on the third Thursday of the month. The committee decided after lengthy discussion to change the usual meeting time, after receiving a request from Drs Christian and Caroline Heim. The decision was not an easy one, especially as the time requested by the Heims was at the weekend...an unfamiliar scheduling for our members.

Fortunately, the Royal Society Southern Highlands found huge support from local organizations who were pleased to offer addition publicity for the occasion. The Southern Highlands Opera Appreciation Group (SHOAG) emailed all their members of the upcoming event, and the Bowral sector of the Association of Australian Decorative and Fine Arts Societies(ADFAS) under Professor Clive Probyn was extremely helpful. These organizations, together with our usual publicity machine, ensured that the Chopin afternoon performance attracted a very healthy audience of 85-90 people, despite the unusual performance time.

Drs Christian and Caroline Heim live in Brisbane, where Christian is a specialist doctor with a full clinical practice and Caroline holds a full time lecturing position at Queensland University of Technology. They flew down to Bowral especially for “*An Afternoon with Chopin and George Sand*”. The performance was at 1.30pm, and the couple were on their way back to the airport at 3pm. It was difficult for them to get away on time as the response from the audience was overwhelming. People milled around the performers at the end of the performance, many of them openly in tears. The ovation that they had given Christian and Caroline was loud and long. There is no question that Christian Heim’s extraordinary Chopin performance on the Chevalier grand piano was an emotional and stirring experience, but when it was coupled with the stage play of his wife as George Sand, depicting the turbulent relationship between the lovers, the experience can only be described as unforgettable.

Christian Heim is a composer. He wrote *An Evening with Chopin* especially for the pair. The Royal Society Southern Highlands with Christian’s permission changed the title slightly to *An Afternoon with Chopin* as it suited the Heims’ request for an afternoon performance on this occasion. In the introduction to the performance, Christian described the historical accuracy of the presentation, as he had researched comprehensively all of the spoken material which Caroline acted out as Chopin’s music stormed all around her. Christian studied music with Peter Sculthorpe, and also in Vienna, Paris and New York. As a Churchill fellow, he studied the healing uses of music in European hospitals. He has had his original music and theatre works performed in Australia and New York, and he

has published on the benefits of music for dementia sufferers. His CD *Prayer Dances* can be heard on ABC classic FM.

Dr Caroline Heim has a Doctorate in Theatre Studies and is a lecturer at Queensland Institute of Technology and a free lance theatre critic for *The Australian*. She studied acting in New York and worked for 7 years on US stages winning a Drama League Award and receiving critical acclaim from *The New York Times*. Her first book *Audience as Performer: the changing role of audiences in the twenty-first century* was published by Routledge in August. Both Caroline and Christian have produced theatre productions in New York, Sydney and Brisbane.

As Caroline and Christian rushed away to the airport, they promised to return soon for another stimulating lecture to the RSSH. On a previous visit, Christian delivered a lecture on his findings of the effect of baroque music on dementia patients. That too was a wonderful and thought-provoking presentation. Royal Society Southern Highlands has been very fortunate to attract speakers of the caliber of the Heims. Most importantly, it has given us the rare opportunity to produce cross disciplinary lectures, with the arts and the sciences inextricably woven together.

Anne Wood