

Review: Micheleine Van Hautem

Show: 'Crème de la Crème'

Venue: Festival Main stage at Founders

Date: Thursday 16 October 7.30pm

Reviewer: Adrienne Matthews

The Nelson Arts Festival needed a big opening act to launch its twentieth anniversary and Michelene Van Hautem, Belgian chanteuse, was a fitting choice. Van Hautem is well known to Nelson audiences from her previous visit to the festival five years ago when she enchanted with her sultry vocals and command of stage and song.

The venue was fitting with its glittering chandelier that promised sparkle and class and Van Hautem did not disappoint. The program, the brand new 'Crème de la Crème', is a mixture of French translations of popular songs by some modern day masters, Dutch favourites and Van Hautem's own compositions.

'Four Seasons In A Day' by Crowded House was a lovely introduction. How the French language makes songs purr and gives them a fresh and indulgent character. 'Moon River' was also exquisite in translation and showed off the beautiful balance between Van Hautem's syrupy voice and her guitarist, Ben Hauptman's, superb accompaniments. The pair work beautifully together which made for an intimate and compelling performance where every subtlety and nuance could be appreciated.

Dusty Springfield, Edith Piaf, Cole Porter, David Bowie amongst others were covered to name a few in a highly diverse programme.

The strength of Van Hautem is her combination of stage presence, vocal versatility and ability to involve her listeners with stories of her life and music. She openly acknowledges those who have influenced her life and career, most notably her compatriot and muse, Jacques Brel. Like him her performances are full of a rich pathos and layers of meaning that easily switch between the dreamy and sombre to the upbeat.

'Crème de la Crème' was warmly received by an audience that clearly appreciated this internationally acclaimed duo who so well expressed 'how fragile we are' (Sting 1987), a perfect ending to a captivating show.