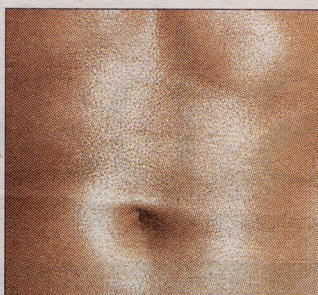


MUSIC



MELBOURNE FESTIVAL SKIN QUARTET

Anna Schwartz Gallery, Flinders Lane,
until tonight

Joel Crotty Reviewer

Brave, new world of sight and sound

The philosophy behind *Skin Quartet* has its origins in a music and visual arts project produced some years ago. Melbourne composer David Young and his creative team worked on the concept of weaving connections between the visual arts and music at the North Melbourne Town Hall. It was a sprawling work in which the audience walked through a number of rooms to witness different events. This time Young has teamed with video artist Louisa Bufardecì and they have produced an event that works on a number of levels.

Unlike the North Melbourne Town Hall experience, in which each room mapped separate shows, *Skin Quartet* is in one space and focuses on recontextualising the CIA's *World Factbook*. This almanac has been reduced to names of countries and ethnicities, which move across the wall against a background of various skin types.

The magnified skin, with or without wrinkles, hair or blemishes, reconfirms the diversity of the human landscape and graphically empowers the names that glide over the various surfaces. There is a subtle potency in Bufardecì's images that Young reinforces in his music.

A traditionally configured string quartet — Yasutaka Hemmi (violin), Stephanie Lindner (violin), Jason Bunn (viola) and Caerwen Martin (cello) — face the screen, and in between the musicians and screened images are the scores, which can be clearly seen by the audience on four laptop computers. For the most part, graphics are used rather than traditional notation. The only time that traditional Western notation appears is when the quartet performs the section titled "Europe".

David Young's music is always quite sparse. He clings to a tradition established by Webern of promoting the simplest of textures. This approach can be fraught with problems as blandness can emerge. However, Young creates a 40-minute soundscape packed with variety. This includes the use of a quarter-sized violin during the Asian section and the use of ice blocks and water in steel bowls to support Antarctica. But at no time does the music descend into gimmickry.

This is Young's strongest theatrical collaboration to date, and its experimentation ideally suits a festival setting.