

## Season finale a grand conclusion

April 4, 2009

No winding down for the Okanagan Symphony Orchestra this year. No sir. It was definitely a wind-**up**. Saturday's concert at the Community Theatre was also a buildup for next year's fiftieth anniversary season.

Unlike most OSO programs, which include music by a Canadian composer, this one focused only on Joseph Haydn, who died in 1809, and on Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, who was born the same year.

Nestled between the opening symphony (Haydn's number 69) and the closing symphony (Mendelssohn's number 3) was, in the opinion of most of the concertgoers, the highlight of the evening: Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto played by Canada's outstanding young virtuoso, Yi-Jia (Susanne) Hou.

Despite attempts to categorize Haydn's 69th as a new departure or as a broadening of scope, it came across as typical Haydn: a mature work by a major composer. The Laudon symphony, as it is sometimes called, was given a correspondingly mature and polished treatment by Maestra Thomson and her forces.

Although Rosemary Thomson has been heavily involved with the Okanagan Symphony for the past three seasons, her tenure as Music Director has been only one year. It is my subjective assessment that Thomson has met the challenges of her position with passing grades all around.

Susanne Hou brings to the stage a lovely image and an engaging personality. Her violin technique is superior, and the tone elicited from the Guarneri del Gesu violin she plays is sumptuous.

I had the feeling that she rushed the final movement of the concerto a bit--as well as some of the ornamentation. Nevertheless, a glamorous performance it was, full of emotional nuances. At its conclusion, the full house roared--and even whistled--its approval.

After the intermission, the orchestra seemed to be pumped up and still under the euphoria of the e-minor concerto. The so-called "Scottish" Symphony may not contain actual Scottish themes, but Mendelssohn's melodies certainly evoke images of Scotland's lochs and heaths.

Maestra Thomson continued the process I had noted in the previous concert by emoting in such a way as to enhance the tonal splendor of the work. Thomson and her talented orchestra are to be congratulated for their always entertaining and often inspiring season.

Charles Velte is a former opera singer who holds a master's degree in music theory.