

50TH OKANAGAN SYMPHONY SEASON STARTS WITH A BANG

The Okanagan Symphony celebrated the start of their 50th season with a grand concert in Kelowna last Friday night.

The programme featured works by Wagner, Elgar, Tchaikovsky and the world premiere of a Piano Concerto by Penticton composer, Ernst Schneider. It was one which was well conceived and performed.

This is the fourth season for me to hear the OSO, and I have seen significant maturing of the orchestra under the baton of Rosemary Thomson and am impressed with the ability and musicality of the players as individuals as well as in the ensemble. Ms. Thomson has achieved a rapport with the group and conducts them with aplomb and artistry. Her conducting is both musical and decisive with stunning results. She clearly indicates shaping of phrases, tempo changes and rhythmic pulses as well as syncopation, making it a joy to watch and listen. The entire orchestra seems to follow her every nuance with breathtaking results. In addition, the blend and balance of sound between sections is remarkable.

Some of the highlights of the concert were the lush string sounds in the Elgar, the soaring melodies in the Wagner and Tchaikovsky, the crisp brass and woodwind playing throughout and the crisp, clean articulation in all the sections. There were, perhaps, minor flaws from time to time, but these were insignificant, given the emotional excitement created during the entire evening.

There were opportunities for solos in the various sections, especially during the Tchaikovsky 5th Symphony. Particularly notable was the French Horn in the 2nd movement, as well as solos from the Flutes, Oboes and Bassoons.

The players shone in virtually every style required of them; lush, soft sections, wildly rhythmic passages, long melodic lines (especially in the strings) and the huge climaxes in the music. It made for an exciting, emotional evening.

It's not often we hear the world premiere of a work, especially one written 29 years previously. This was the case, however, with the Piano Concerto by Ernst Schneider, performed by our own wonderful pianist, Arnold Draper. The work, billed as a Romantic concerto more than lived up to expectations. Schneider is a renowned composer, widely recognized for his skill and artistry. His concerto did not disappoint. It is filled with simple, haunting melodies, melodies that soar beyond belief, sharply accented brass work, bell like piano and strongly syncopated rhythm, giving it a contemporary feel.

All of this was given a fantastic performance by our own Arnold Draper. As a pianist myself, I can appreciate the tremendous complexity required, as well as the technical challenges to be overcome. Mr. Draper exceeded the challenge by his brilliant pianistic work. He was the soloist where required, and the accompanist where required, always maintaining the optimum balance between himself and the orchestra who worked as one with him under Ms. Thomson's direction. The end of the Concerto brought the audience to our feet as a tribute to Schneider, Draper, the orchestra and Rosemary Thomson.

The concert ended with the magnificent Tchaikovsky 5th Symphony, considered by many to one of the greatest works ever. It was here that the orchestra really showed their stuff. It was a moving, emotional interpretation which left us breathless and mesmerized by the beauty and the powerful finish. This challenging, complex work was given a stellar performance which brought the audience to its feet in a well-deserved, prolonged ovation. What a way to start a season!

Marvin Dickau. A. Music, Univ. of AB, is an Organist, Pianist and Conductor of choirs and small orchestras, who has given solo piano and organ recitals and accompanied many singers and instrumentalists in Kelowna and Calgary.