

## Okanagan Symphony – Big Bang – Oct 18, 2009

I didn't realize how much I've been mourning the loss of my summer flowers and vegetables until I saw Rosemary Thomson wave her baton in front of the Okanagan Symphony Orchestra Sunday at the Performing Arts Centre. The Music returned. I could step in autumn and exhale. I didn't realize I'd been holding my breath so long.

There's nothing like Wagner to wake up the music after a hot Okanagan summer. The Prelude from *Die Meistersinger Von Nurnberg* was harmonizing and balancing and a lovely way to open the OSO's 50<sup>th</sup> year. It's joyful to see our young musicians on stage, the exquisite Venables sisters and passionate young cellist Nick Denton.

Next was the world premiere of Penticton composer Ernst Schneider's *Romantic Piano Concerto*.

It sat on a shelf for 29 years, never played.

"It just seems like it flows straight out of heaven," said Thomson.

I agree. You had me at the second movement. It opened with a slow penetrating conversation between Schneider, pianist Arnold Draper and myself. I felt so deeply heard, though I was the one doing the listening. It brought to mind the Sufi poem: I am an eye, You are my light. How rare and wonderful to be so heard in an era of fast-paced instant communication. I can't believe I wore mascara.

Gustav Holst's *The Planets* was cancelled due to sudden funding cuts. It required hiring a body of horn players. Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 was played instead.

But Edmund House on a single French horn was positively debilitating. My thoughts suspended, my mind arrested and melted, and I was reconstructed in the sound. The horn assembles you in its call.

"Should not a symphony reveal those wordless urges that hide in the heart, asking fervently for expression?" wrote Tchaikovsky.

It was local Hip Hop artist 'Immaculate,' Julien Wolansky's second time at a live symphony Sunday. He described his experience of Tchaikovsky this way:

"The second movement in the last piece, that's when it really did it. The style of that movement had a lot of similar elements stylistically to the music I make. The finger picking of the violins and violas, the chord progressions, they created a certain emotion; the word would be -- realization."

"He (Tchaikovsky) discovered something in that movement. It was exciting. I always saw classical music as pretty tame. I like energetic and upbeat music, and that movement was the most intriguing, it was edgy, gripping and exciting to me. It captured my attention."

"I spent almost half the time with my eyes closed and my head back, appreciating and analyzing the different components that the composer used to create, I guess the chemistry of all of the instruments."

Me? I like how our symphony plays the subtleties and yearnings. Of course I loved the great six faux endings of Tchaikovsky as much as anyone.

But I think our OSO shines in playing the yearning of the soul. Much more than a glaring blaring sound, is the sophistication needed to sustain a subtle still sound that penetrates the heart.

Most of us have come to the Okanagan from somewhere else. We're all hearing that call.

It was played Sunday on the 150-year-old violin of late OSO player Don Cowell. His colleagues played Elgar's *Nimrod* as a tribute, Imant Raminsh bowing on the century plus strings – as if there isn't enough already to love about Raminsh! The playing was so soft and sweet, and just one glance at the faces of Cowell's friends as they serenaded his spirit could turn a heart around. I didn't have a dry eye on my face, (damn mascara). The last note hovered over Cowell's violin for a long time. It held on in a stillness and then a sustained silence of honour. What a tribute to life. Just love the people you're with.

I'm just as against the budget cuts as the next person, but I don't know how you could have improved on Sunday's show. You had me at Ernst's movement 2. I would take Edmund's single horn over dozens any time, Arnold Draper is an Okanagan gem and the warmth and intimacy of our orchestra is priceless. I don't need a big bang, but I do like our sweet hellos, our smiling volunteers and the best deviled eggs in the valley.

I can finally say good-bye to my roses, and yet, I'm certain a *Rosemary* by any other name would never sound as sweet.