

Campbell, Raminsh shine in super concert

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The magnificent playing of clarinetist James Campbell and the sumptuous sonorities of Imant Raminsh combined to inspire the full house at the Kelowna Community Theatre Saturday evening. In fact, the concert's theme, Inspirations, was spot on.

The program opened with Sergei Prokofiev's exuberant "Classical" symphony, most of which was composed when Prokofiev was 26 years old. His tempi and altitude in the scoring for the top violins makes the part quite challenging, as evidenced by some disagreements on pitch. Despite this, Maestra Rosemary Thomson led her charges in a delightful romp through the score.

Next came Mozart's monumental Concerto K.622 played by James Campbell, Canada's King of the Clarinet and arguably one of the world's greatest exponents of the instrument. Campbell's phrasing, breath control and dynamic range were fantastic, and for me at least, it was an unforgettable aesthetic experience.

There was nothing safe about this performance. Anyone who has played clarinet in the school band knows how dangerous soft playing can be and how easily the tone can break. (In fact, there was a minor break near the end of the first movement, but wow! What dazzling dynamics.) The concert resumed after the intermission with Gabriel Fauré's elegant and courtly Masques et Bergamasques. Although it made the program overly long, it was, I felt, a welcome change of pace and a good introduction to the remainder of the concert.

Stephen Chatman's aptly named Prairie Dawn returned James Campbell to the stage. This piece in one movement is essentially a clarinet concerto, even down to its three subsections. Unlike a standard concerto, however, with its fast--slow--fast movements, Prairie Dawn is subdivided into slow--fast--slow passages.

The solo part with its disjointed melodic leaps is immensely difficult, which might not have been duly appreciated because of the apparent ease with which Campbell negotiated the treacherous terrain. The overall effect was quite Coplandesque.

After all that, imagine a sacred mass to wrap things up. It was the Missa Brevis by the Okanagan's own Imant Raminsh. The mass is a glorious setting of the Latin text for soprano soloist, mixed chorus, and full orchestra.

Raminsh is one of Canada's most influential and gifted composers. His Aura Chamber Choir celebrated its 30th anniversary in fine fashion by singing the choral parts in Missa Brevis. This was my first experience with this wonderful work, but certainly not my last.

Dawn Mussellam delivered her usual excellent performance as soprano soloist. Bravo Maestro Raminsh. Bravi tutti.

Charles Velte is a former opera singer who holds a master's degree in Music Theory.