

## Symphony opener a blast

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Friday's season-opening concert of the Okanagan Symphony at the Kelowna Community Theatre was billed as material likely to be seen, heard, or discussed at a French Café. That gives the planner quite a broad scope but at the same time implies a certain French connection.

The Bergmann Piano Duo, Elizabeth and Marcel, started things off, doing Poulenc with panache. It was Francis Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos. The work is witty; much of it is tongue-in-cheek; and it is filled with surprise changes in tempi, dynamics, styles, and mood; in short, it is pure Poulenc.

Doing justice to such a delicacy requires great finesse, which is exactly what team Bergmann brought to the table. With the precision and technique of the Bergmann duo, none of the composer's quirkiness was lost in translation.

Maestra Rosemary Thomson is to be congratulated, not just for her excellent work on the podium, but also for her presence of mind to use the two on-stage pianos for the next item on the agenda: The Carnival of the Animals by Camille Saint-Saens.

Thomson was also aware that British Columbia's own Bill Richardson had written some remarkable narrative verse for this work, and when she found out that Richardson had actually played in the OSO some years back, she just had to have him for this event.

Richardson was aware that Ogden Nash had already done his own narration to the Carnival. This would have given just about any wordsmith pause, but Bill Richardson plunged in undaunted with barely an apology for carrying on in such a Nashian fashion. He needn't have worried; in my opinion, the Richardson rhymes are at least the equal of the Nash narration; and having the author himself to deliver the delightful ditty gives the Bill Richardson Carnival a distinct edge.

The Bergmanns played with gusto and relish, and the entire ensemble was obviously enjoying itself immensely. As an added bonus, Maestra Thomson traded her baton for a cello in the romantic Swan movement, and--I must say--acquitted herself honorably.

From that pinnacle, unfortunately, the French Café went a bit downhill. After the break, the audience was treated to a plethora of Spanish songs and song fragments by Spanish born composer José Evangelista. The title, Cancioneros, means "singers," and the music sounded fairly primitive and oriental, probably due to Evangelista's preoccupation with the gamelan instrument and his attempt to compose in purely melodic terms. To me, the sound was quite ragged, not because the musicians were out of sync, but because Evangelista writes that way, with ornamentation and pauses.

To close with a commanding crash, the Kelowna Night Owl Orchestra joined forces with the Okanagan Symphony for Maurice Ravel's well known Bolero. The Night Owl Orchestra is a student-community group directed by Sheila French. Its members swelled the ranks of the OSO to an impressive 100 players.

It was an undeniable visual and sonic experience, and if I think of it as another fun number, it succeeded admirably. Quite effective was the start with one solo snare drum and gradually adding drummers on the apron until, at the end, four drummers were tapping out the inexorable rhythm.

Mostly the solo woodwinds seemed to be committing frequent indiscretions, but also the brass players managed to add their own bloopers. Let's blame the amateur Night Owls, shall we? The other thing that bothered me--maybe my wife and I just imagined it--was the tempo, which should be steady as a metronome throughout. It wasn't quite. All in all, though, a memorable event.