

Vive l'orchestre

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The OSO opened Sunday at the performing arts centre with *In a French Café* as its theme. Concertmaster Denis Letourneau's stark opening down-bow met midair with the hands of guest pianist Elizabeth Bergmann as they bounced upwards from her first note in Francis Poulenc's *Concerto for Two Pianos*. Bergmann and her husband, Marcel, were the featured piano duo for this and for Camille Saint-Saens' *Le Carnaval des Animaux*.

These two playful pieces evoked a joy in creativity, which the two French composers shared, and the husband-wife team was able to ride the playfulness together.

CBC personality Bill Richardson introduced the whimsical *Le Carnaval des Animaux* with humour and originality. To the Offenbach *Can-Can*, scored with wrong-note harmonies and slowed to a tortoise's pace he said: "The tortoise can dance as well as a man can. Tortoise, do the Offenbach *Can-Can*."

Two very serious bass players bowed a Mendelssohn waltz adapted for elephants, while *The Swan* movement was beautifully played with a raining of finger drops on Elizabeth's keyboard.

The most outstanding piece of the evening was Montréal-based composer Jose Evangelista's *Cancioneros*. Born in Valencia, Evangelista ties this wealth of musical geography with his love of Balinese Gamelan music. *Cancioneros* is a tradition of Spanish balladry — a treasure house of people's poetry — gone through long periods of collective elaboration.

After 40 years in Canada, Evangelista has infused Canadian wilderness into this tradition. His opening, so delicately and intimately played by the OSO players, fused Middle Eastern themes with a powwow pulse. The second movement highlighted the lament of a forest longing for ancient days. And the third movement relied on the double reed and the bassoon, to produce what the ney, a lone reed, one of the oldest instruments still in use has done for millennia: evoke human yearning toward universal awe. The sensitive addition of the violins added a beautiful resonance to this heartfelt composition.

To conclude, maestra Rosemary Thomson packed the orchestra with beaming young musicians from the Night Owl Orchestra and positioned percussionist Bruce Hencal with his lone snare drum in front of her. With quiet taps, he drew the orchestra and audience into the rhythm of Ravel's *Bolero*. The exquisite Margaret Burton poured the first piece of melody through her flute, followed by her husband, Walter, on (oboe), who seamlessly made way for the sensual bassoons and the soothing pluck of cellos.

Some squawks and squabbles followed, a modicum of chaos — including a violin bow dropping to the floor — but amongst the exuberance, all was forgiven. After all, it's *Bolero* for God's sake! Bring it on! And they did.

As the piece crescendoed, a Night Owl musician with a snare drum in hand joined the lone drummer. Then another, and another, until four drummers lead the orchestra and audience into the grand crescendo and Ravel's infamous slide from D flat to C.

Exuberant. This was Thomson's *Bolero*.