Another breathtaking ride with Les Violons du Roy

Ensemble sees to every detail, impeccably. And Salle Pierre Mercure provides the optimal venue

KATE MOLLESON
Freelance

Wednesday, September 26, 2007

There was a moment on Monday night when I realized I hadn't been breathing properly for a good several minutes. Les Violons du Roy were hurtling through a Haffner Symphony presto that was cleaner, fiercer and plain faster than any Mozart I've ever heard, ever, and, having run out of superlatives, I clung to the edge of my seat and simply held my breath.

The venue was UQÀM's Salle Pierre Mercure, which has an intimate, unforgiving acoustic in which every fine detail of Les Violons' small forces was immediately audible. And, as always, the details were fine: impeccable articulation, riveting dynamic contrast and near spotless ensemble. The list could go on - vibrant pianissimos, exquisite bow work - and on - beautifully sculpted phrases, stylish ornamentation.

Whereas in Place des Arts orchestral seating arrangement has little impact on the faint wash of sound that reaches the audience, here conductor Bernard Labadie's transparent textures projected clearly, every exchange between the antiphonally placed first and second violins becoming significant.

And when the occasional unclean entry inevitably occurred, it was razor-edge sharp on the repeat, proving once again that Les Violons is an alert, communicative group of musicians. Even the look of them screams vibrancy, bassoonist Nadina Mackie Jackson's shock of azure-blue hair providing a kind of visual centrepiece to the small stage.

The all-Mozart program made decent thematic sense: a march, a symphony and a serenade all composed for Salzburg's eminent Haffner family. All three works are in D major, a key whose emphasis on open strings perfectly suits Les Violons' trademark raw, bright sound. They attacked the blithe, bombastic Symphony No. 35, K 385, with ferocious gusto, its Mannheim rockets and driving continuo conveying all the cocky cheek of the 26-year-old Mozart in his prime.

Following such a favourite with the slightly obscure and sprawling eight-movement Serenade, K 250, was a courageous programming move even for the most dedicated Mozartians. Violinist Pascale Giguère approached the solo parts with unreserved, full-bow directness and percussive left-hand finger work. But I must admit that by the third minuet my attention, suffering from sensory overdrive, packed in. I always leave Les Violons concerts utterly, happily, exhausted.

© The Gazette (Montreal) 2007

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2008 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.
CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.