LIFE

Classical Notes: Bassoonist, trumpeter deliver dynamic reeds and brass

Bassoonist Nadina Mackie Jackson and Guy Few

At four-foot, six-inches tall, a bassoon was described at Sunday's concert as "a bedpost-looking instrument with a bendy tube coming out of it." But if it could have been unfolded, its height would have been eight feet, six inches.

It's one of the double-reed woodwinds, and audiences compare its warm, dark, reedy sound to that of a male baritone voice.

Dynamic Duo, when Nadina Mackie Jackson on bassoon joined Guy Few, playing on trumpet.

Starting with Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3*, with most of the players standing in a semi-circle, this was one of the six most famous Baroque pieces ever composed.

Bach has been described as the father of jazz, and the pacing and rhythm of the orchestra was perfect.

In this concerto, the adagio movement is probably the shortest slow movement ever written, consisting of only two chords. Perhaps these were intended to accompany an improvised harpsichord or violin cadenza, as played Sunday by Denis Letourneau.

Then came the first concerto, Vivaldi's *C Major Bassoon Concerto*. Mackie Jackson is a world class bassoonist and perhaps, for the first time in our lives, made us listen to what the instrument can do.

Afterwards, when I asked about the speed of the notes, she explained that the double reed enabled double and triple-tonguing.

She made it sound so easy, which it couldn't have been. Bassoon concertos are far from common, yet Vivaldi wrote 37 of them.

Few followed with Pietro Baldassare's *Concerto for Trumpet & Strings*. Playing a piccolo trumpet, he too made it sound easy – the notes were clear as a bell. Fiendishly fast, it bounced along, followed by a delicate slow waltz, finishing at the gallop.

The third concerto brought them both on stage. Commissioned by Mackie Jackson from Matthieu Lussier after a chance meeting with Few, *Double Concerto for Trumpet, Bassoon and Orchestra* was only the second written for these instruments.

Appalachian Spring, scored for chamber orchestra by Aaron Copland, was commissioned by choreographer and dancer Martha Graham. And on Sunday the performance was dedicated to longtime Vernon resident Miriam Jayne, who recently died.

After it was premiered at the Library of Congress, with Martha Graham dancing the lead role, Copland was awarded the Pulitzer Music Prize.

Originally there was no title. Copland referred to it simply as "Ballet for Martha." But shortly before the premiere, Graham suggested *Appalachian Spring*. Because he had composed it without knowing the title, Copland was much amused when told how perfectly he'd captured the beauty of the Appalachians.

It tells the story of a spring celebration of 19th century American pioneers after building a new farmhouse. The characters include a bride and groom, a pioneer woman, a preacher and his congregation.

Divided into eight sections, it ended with what became known as the Shaker Hymn, used by Sydney Carter in his widely recognized *Lord of the Dance*.

The encore was a true show-stopper. They wheeled out the Steinway and, backed by the orchestra, they played the Fast Dance from Shostakovitch's *Jazz Suite No. 3*. Along with Mackie Jackson on the bassoon, Few played trumpet and piano simultaneously.

– Jim Elderton is a Vernon-based freelance writer and fillm-maker, who reviews the Okanagan Symphony season for The Morning Star.

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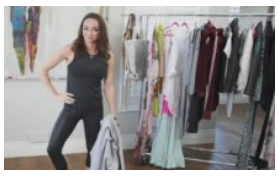

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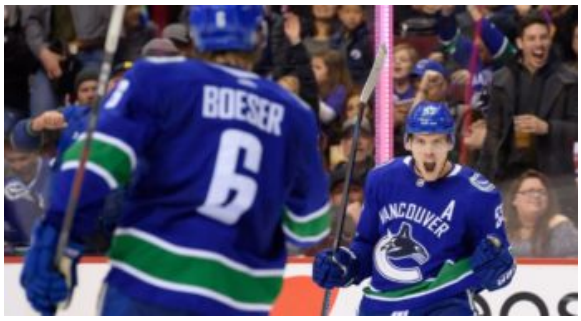

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