Symphony, guests were dynamic

MARVIN
DICKAU
Review

The Okanagan Symphony continued its stellar season last Friday at Kelowna Community Theatre with guest artists Nadina Mackie Jackson, bassoonist, and Guy Few, trumpeter.

They were billed as the Dynamic Duo and they certainly lived up to the name.

In fact, the entire evening was dynamic, starting with an exciting performance of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3. What made this even more special was the entry of the orchestra. They all walked in to start, along with conductor Rosemary Thomson, and immediately began playing while standing up, in the European Baroque tradition.

The cellists and bassists sat, of course! This style created an invigorating atmosphere, which carried right through. The orchestra was in fine form, displaying great dexterity and warmth for the entire concert.

Jackson performed the wonderful Vivaldi Concerto for bassoon and orchestra, playing with a great deal of vigor and charm. Her tone was wonderful in all ranges, but was especially sweet in the upper register.

She was, of course, totally at ease with the music and the instrument, worthy of her reputation as one of the world's leading bassoonists. Her technique was impeccable in all the fast moving parts, her legatos were outstanding and her dynamics were superb

The Baroque music continued with Few performing a Baldassere Concerto for trumpet and strings. He also lived up to his reputation as one of the foremost trumpeters of today. Playing the piccolo trumpet, he gave a dynamic performance, tossing off the high notes and the fast moving passages with ease and clarity. He was as one with the instrument.

After intermission, we had the pleasure of hearing a fairly new work by Canadian composer Matthieu Lussier, commissioned by Jackson, written as a double concerto for trumpet, bassoon and orchestra, one of some 10 such works now in existence.

As you are probably aware, I am fond of contemporary music and this work is at the top of the list. The interplay between the soloists was outstanding.

The writing was creative and the soloists made the most of it, sharing the score, then performing solos, always in perfect sync and balance with each other and the orchestra. I particularly enjoyed the downward cascading and undulating chords in the orchestra. It was a wonderfully satisfying time.

The soloists' techniques were marvelous in every way and the orchestra was in top form, with a challenging score.

Copland's Appalachian Spring proved to be a perfect foil for the other music. Well-known for its many and varied rhythmic patterns and moods, it was presented with great finesse by the orchestra. As usual, Thomson's conducting was stylish and graceful, shaping the phrases to make them even more beautiful.

The closing theme, American folk song Simple Gifts, led to a lush and lyrical quiet ending.

A planned encore, Shostakovich's Fast Dance from his Jazz Suite No.2 was the perfect end for a magnificent evening. It featured Jackson on bassoon and Few on trumpet and piano (he sometimes played both at the same time). A delightful little jazzy, rhythmical, fast paced composition, it was a joy to hear and, I believe, a joy for the performers.

It led to an enthusiastic, prolonged standing ovation.

Marvin Dickau is a Kelowna resident and an organist, pianist and conductor with an A.Mus. from the University of Alberta.

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