Concert Review: Nadina Mackie Jackson and the PGSO

I had the incredible privilege and pleasure of attending last night's Prince George Symphony Orchestra (PGSO) concert, featuring a homecoming appearance by bassoon Master Nadina Mackie Jackson.

I am a pretty big fan of the PGSO and have attended more than my fair share of exquisite performances. Each and every time, despite my keen knowledge of their incredible talent and professionalism, these musicians blow me away. Last night's event was no exception.

With recently inducted conductor Kevin Zakresky at the helm for his inaugural main stage performance, the PGSO wowed its fans. We were warmed up with a selection from Handel's *The Water Music*, which was brilliantly introduced by Zakresky, who set the stage perfectly with a bit of scandalous Handel history and a lively description of the scene we could have expected had we joined King George I for his concert on the Thames. Once the King's barge movement had ended, Zakresky had the fortune of introducing our bassoonist for the evening, the gal with the blue hair, Nadina Mackie Jackson. With this introduction, my world changed.

Allow me to deviate from the music for a moment. Before she began playing, Nadina borrowed the mic from Zakresky and humbly thanked the PGSO and her audience for the opportunity to play in her home town again. She reminded us of the incredible talent housed in Prince George and she, and her prodigious tale of hard work and consequential monstrous personal accomplishments, inspired the heck out of me.

You need only to gaze upon Nadina a moment to know that you're in for quite a show. Sporting a shock of Smurf-blue hair, a breathtaking and outstandingly out of the ordinary pair of Canadian-designed gowns and an eye twinkle I could spot from the twenty-first row back, Nadina isn't exactly what first comes to mind when you think of symphony soloist. As soon as she puts lip to reed though, all preconceptions ebb. Nadina Mackie Jackson is a testament not only to Prince George, British Columbia, Canada or the world, she is a testament to the spirit and soul of music. Through her *Grand Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra* (Hummel) and *Concerto for Bassoon*

and Orchestra in C minor RV 480 (Vivaldi), Nadina so clearly demonstrates the beautiful, joyful passion with which she plays. I know technical musicians and I know musical musicians; Nadina Mackie Jackson is a perfect marriage between a keen technical understanding and a truly musical, creative and artistic soul.

To conclude this show, Nadina bowed gracefully and allowed the PGSO the opportunity to continue to do what it does best. Zakresky made a final introduction, just as lively as the last, nudging his audience into a parlour filled with Viennese aristocrats, before luring his symphony into Mozart's *Symphony #29 in A major*. Spell-binding. The Prince George audience was held in thrall until allowed to burst into applause to show amazed appreciation for the evening's spectacle.

To see Nadina Mackie Jackson accompanied by our remarkable PGSO was a special treat. Thank you, and congratulations, to the PGSO, Kevin Zakresky and Nadina Mackie Jackson for the outstanding evening and for continuing to entertain and inspire through the art of music.

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