Smaller gems shine at Elora fest

Review by Stephen Preece, for The Record

ELORA — While some of the bigger, snazzier Elora Festival shows are grabbing much of the attention, this year's smaller classical music gems should not be overlooked.

Three afternoon concerts over the weekend each offered a wonderful, out-of-the-way musical offering of superlative quality.

Duo Affinite — Guy Few on trumpet, corno and piano, and Nadia Mackie Jackson bassoon — created that irresistible combination of extraordinary musicianship and engaging showboating.

Their loosely-knit theme — prince and princess — was appropriate, with the first half featuring music either written for royalty (Paganini sonatas), or had a courtly Baroque-inspired dance feel (Boismortier and St-Saens).

A highlight was the Beethoven variations on a theme from Mozart's *Magic Flute*. These seven variations ran the gamut from dreamy, milky-melodrama, to a mysteriously, misty-minor, culminating in a final blistering gallop to the finish.

Their playing showcased the deeply expressive talent of each solo performer while also exploring interconnecting musical tapestries as they wove together the various melodies, harmonies and accompaniments.

The second set took on a decidedly contemporary feel. Starting off was Canadian composer Bill Douglas' *Partita for Bassoon and Piano* — a fantastically eclectic piece incorporating elements of bebop, new age, world, and blues traditions.

With the risk of too many ingredients, this piece worked on its own terms, generating a likable, accessible musical journey.

The final *Dance for Trumpet, Bassoon and Piano* (Shostakovich), had the audience in stitches as the pair crashed through a wild cancan, Few alternating between his trumpet and piano with comedic gusto.