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REVIEW: Audience left wanting more at 'Music in a Time of War'

Alyssa Wright
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Nadina Mackie, bassoon, and Alexander Panizza, piano, performed in Barrie on Saturday, March 21, 2026 at Hiway Church. | Images supplied

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The following review was submitted by Alyssa Wright, who is a cellist, singer-songwriter, music educator and writer based in Barrie.

When one pictures a virtuosic performance, a bassoon is generally not the first instrument to spring to mind, but that is exactly what Nadina Mackie and pianist Alexander Panizza delivered for Barrie Concerts at Hiway Church on Saturday night in *Music in a Time of War*.

From the moment Mackie walked on stage, she drew the audience in with her personable and often hilarious introductions, before dazzling us with her playing.

While the bassoon is well represented in orchestral and chamber music, there historically hasn't been much written for it as a solo instrument, “but I have no trouble stealing.”

And so, the program began with a piece ‘stolen’ from cello: Beethoven’s seven variations on *Bei Männern, welche Liebe fülen* from Mozart’s *Magic Flute*, introducing us to Mackie’s command of the full range of the instrument, as well as her impeccable tone, which manages to stay warm and rounded even at the dynamic extremes.

Next was *le Dernier Chant d’Ophélie* by Canadian composer Mathieu Lussier, arranged for and dedicated to Mackie. This starts with solo bassoon, low notes reaching up into high laments, with the piano joining to capture Ophelia’s rage and sorrow, and ending in a long and quiet note held — with unbelievable breath control — to signify her death. It was a beautifully written piece, elevated by the performers’ extraordinary musicality.

We then heard the Canadian premiere of *Mimas*, a sonata for bassoon and piano written by Katherine Needleman, named after a Giant of Greek mythology and one of Saturn’s 82 moons.

The first movement, *Diffusion*, includes wildly arpeggiated figures and passionate exclamations. *Makara* starts lightly then is taken over by a rhythmic piano riff, with the bassoon growling countermelody then moving into lighter territory again and ending on a high note that enticed the audience to clap between movements. *Chorale, Horn Pipe & Dies Irae* awed and captivated us all.

Local poet Alastair MacLeod read his moving *Poem for Peace* before Mackie and Panizza brilliantly finished the first set with Mendelssohn's *Variations Concertantes*, again 'stolen' from cello.

After intermission, Panizza got his moment to shine with a spellbinding performance of *Scriabin's Sonate No.2 in G# minor*. As a soloist, he could now let loose the full dynamic range of the Shigeru piano, navigating the blisteringly fast passages with intensity and elegance.

Mackie returned to the stage to finish their program with Prokofiev's *Sonata (for flute) in D Major*.

Now, this is a difficult enough piece on the flute, so for Mackie to dance through these passages on an instrument several times its size (weight as well as air column) was astounding.

When the audience couldn't help but applaud after the second of four movements, Mackie graciously took a sip of water and said "isn't he great?'

Yes, certainly — but this was not about Prokofiev, it was all about her artistry.

An instant standing ovation was rewarded by the *Flight of the* (very large, impossibly quick, yet ever-so-nimble) *Bumblebee*, which elicited a second ovation, sending us home wanting more.

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