

Turovsky tour de force

To open its fortieth season, the Kelowna Community Concert Association brought Yuli Turovsky and his wonderful I Musici de Montreal string ensemble to Kelowna Sunday evening in the Community Theatre. The concert with its customary capacity crowd reaffirmed the KCCA's tradition of high quality performances at a modest price.

This was an all Russian program in which the Turovsky family shone. Yuli wielded the baton while his wife Eleonora, the concertmaster, played with sumptuous tone and enviable technique. Their daughter, Natasha, not only plays the violin with great passion and precision, but also painted her own conception of pictures evoked by the music of Modest Mussorgsky.

The program opened with the Notturmo movement of Alexander Borodin's second string quartet. The main theme (probably recognized as And This Is My Beloved from the musical Kismet) is a gorgeous melody that Borodin weaves with contrapuntal imitation and poignant echo effects. Worthy of mention is Alain Aubur's solo cello. Aubur has a big, bright tone with a strong vibrato and constant nuance.

The members of I Musici de Montreal are topflight, well seasoned performers who can (and do) reconfigure themselves as needed. In fact, only the concert master, the principal cellist, and the double bass player kept their same positions throughout the concert. In florid passages, where notes flew furious and fast, the musicians showed complete mastery of their instruments and played with security and precision.

Next on the program was Tchaikovsky's opus 70 Souvenir of Florence. Tchaikovsky is rightly known for his infectious melodies but not for his command of counterpoint. The fugue in the fourth movement of the Florentine Souvenir is, however, as polyphonic as anything from the baroque masters and belies the notion that Tchaikovsky couldn't write counterpoint.

After the intermission, the musicians of Montreal returned to perform Modest Moussorgsky's well known Pictures at an Exhibition. I was aware that Moussorgsky had composed this suite as a solo piano piece and that Maurice Ravel had orchestrated it. The Ravel arrangement uses woodwinds, brass and percussion instruments, none of which are present in I Musici's arsenal.

Since the arranger was not listed in the program, I turned to the Internet to discover that person's identity. There I found 28 orchestral versions and 70 non-orchestral arrangements of Pictures at an Exhibition listed--everything from punk rock to full orchestra, chorus and soloists; the arranger of this piece shall thus remain anonymous.

Maestro Turovsky announced the history of his multimedia approach to this work and the role of his daughter Natasha in producing illustrations to accompany the music. These drawings are Natasha's own conception, not copies or parodies of Viktor Hartmann's original art. A digital illustrator was found, who infused animation into Natasha's drawings, and the outcome was projected onto the screens in the auditorium while the ensemble did a good job of recreating the various Moussorgsky moods.

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