

## Review, Ensemble Vivant

I probably shouldn't write this. Not that it shouldn't be written, but perhaps that it should be someone else.

Having worked as a professional musician for 25 years, I've developed a fairly extensive and diverse knowledge base, and I can find my way around a few instruments with decent ability. In spite of that reality, I don't really feel qualified to review the performance by Ensemble Vivant last Thursday evening.

Led by a remarkable pianist, Catherine Wilson, Ensemble Vivant boasts a collection of musicians whose abilities and qualifications are second to none. At this level of talent, one can for the most part only express opinions, as technical nitpicking becomes like listening for the one or two specks of dust on a fine recording. The quintet, consisting of Catherine Wilson (piano), Sybil Shanahan (cello), Corey Gemmell (violin), Norman Hathaway (viola, shaker) and Don Thompson (vibes, piano) presented a nice mix of beautifully played music, from Bach to Widor, with even a surprise jazz solo piece thrown in by Don Thompson.

The opening number was the familiar Bach "Little Fugue" in G Minor, and it immediately set the standard for the rest of the evening. Catherine runs a tight and well rehearsed group, with entrances, cut-offs, dynamics and soli all cohesive (at least to my ears), and even in the few spots where I detected improvisation from Don Thompson (a true jazz master on an international level possessing a wry wit to match), it never felt sloppy. Each instrumentalist was given a chance to shine within the arrangements, as well as taking turns introducing the pieces. As an aside, it was a pleasure to hear well spoken musicians clearly addressing the audience. Too many performers neglect something so simple yet so important.

I suppose as a reviewer, I cannot just write an entirely positive article. So, if I must present one critique, (and it is one that does not just apply to this group) , I wonder why we don't hear more energetic music in a concert. Audiences always like to hear and see performers push their limits a little. (Not that the music here was at all safe, some of the pieces were very technically challenging). That having been said, Ensemble Vivant gave us a diversity of music and sound (mixing in vibes especially added a whole new dimension), that seemed to please the full house, including a good mix of Canadian composition and arranging.

For me, this was the highlight of the KCCA concert series so far. I had the pleasure of spending some time with the group after the concert, and they are a fun, humble, and inspiring group of musicians. Just to be able to sit and talk with a personal idol of mine, Don Thompson O.C., was a huge bonus. And while it would be easy for such a presence as his to dominate any given performance, the mutual talent and respect within the ensemble put forth a balanced and wonderful interpretation of classical and contemporary music to please and impress most any listener. Merci Ensemble Vivant.

Submitted by Neville Bowman, musician, actor and composer