

Review - Manitoba Chamber Orchestra

The Kelowna Community Concert Association, once again under the guidance of Betty Skilbeck and her team, has begun the 2017-2018 season of concerts, and they didn't play it safe. The full theatre was treated to a wonderful and challenging performance by the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, under the baton of Anne Manson, and featuring the remarkable cello playing of Ariel Barnes.

The technical performance of the orchestra was excellent, whether playing the familiar Haydn cello concerto and Mozart, or working their way through much more contemporary pieces, which were both challenging for the musicians and the listeners. The opening piece, Earthshine (written by Jeffrey Ryan, who was present to hear his work), and the closing Mozart piece, Symphony No. 29, were performed without the featured guest. This showed the orchestra's ability to shift from a very challenging modern work, almost more of a soundscape, with consistent dissonance moving in and out as the piece slowly developed, to the crowd pleasing classically challenging Mozart, which gave us a chance to hear the lovely horns hidden in the back. I'm glad they finished with this piece, they were warmed up and accustomed to the room, and sounded like a tight orchestra.

Now for Mr. Ariel Barnes. Canada has this habit of producing truly amazing musicians, players who break boundaries, all with remarkable skill, and as was the case with Mr Barnes, a smile on their faces. His technical playing was beyond my expertise to critique. In each piece he displayed the flexibility and range of the cello, with an apparent ease and joy that most soloists never achieve. In the third movement of the Haydn, already a fast section, he was almost pushing the tempo, the demanding solo lines proving no match for his dexterity. In the opening of the second half, he took the cello to places I'm sure it was never intended to go, in Michael Oesterle's "Ironman" Concerto, even obviously having fun in the third movement of a very difficult contemporary work. Something I really appreciated in watching Mr Barnes was how, in spite of being the featured soloist, he was always listening to the orchestra, always working as part of the music, not just a soloist. Some feature players forget the importance of this.

The season has begun! It looks to be a diverse one, and well worth following. While there is waiting list to get in, make friends with a KCCA member, and maybe you can grab a seat if they miss a show. It'll be worth your time, I promise. You'll be entertained, and maybe even see and hear some things you've never experienced.

Submitted by Neville Bowman, singer, actor, musician