

Reviews

Double Concerto

There was certainly no lack of the dramatic in Canadian composer Andrew P. MacDonald's *Double Concerto* for Violin, Piano and Orchestra, written for Newfoundland's ECMA nominated Duo Concertante.

The composer pitted the two soloists against each other and against the orchestra, brilliantly handling the seemingly Goliath task of balancing two delicate instruments with the massive orchestral forces.

Violinist Nancy Dahn and pianist Timothy Steeves ... demonstrated playing characterized by outstanding clarity, expert technique and an intense energy that was sustained from start to finish.

The orchestra played at its uninhibited best, showing that they could indeed play with fearless abandon. The piece demonstrated MacDonald's masterful orchestral writing, an absolutely thorough understanding of the capabilities of each instrument.

The composer used a great variety of tone colours and a modern harmonic language to enhance a piece characterized by an aura of pervading restlessness and rhythmic intensity which was interrupted by only a few sporadic moments of calm.

The Guardian, Charlottetown, P.E.I. • Friday, February 25, 2000

Double Concerto

The centerpiece of the evening with the premiere performance of Ontario-born composer Andrew MacDonald's *Double Concerto* Op. 51 for violin, piano and orchestra....

Any trepidation I may have had before Friday's concert evaporated as MacDonald's magnificent work unfolded. Roughly following a traditional fast-slow-fast layout, but all in one movement, the concerto invoked a broad and fertile range of orchestral textures and instrumental pairings.

The first and closing sections offer a sort of angular antiphony of thematic material, in which the duo and various orchestral combinations play off each other. As exciting as all the florid developments and cadenzas were, however, some of the most inspired ideas were to be found in the slow section. At one point the bottom drops out of the texture as Dahn and principal flutist Michelle Cheramy answer back and forth on a single ethereal note. The motif later recurs in piano with flute, and then between soloists. It seems like such a simple idea, yet comes across as thoroughly ingenious.

As promised by the composer in his program notes, the concerto served well as a vehicle for Dahn's and Steeves' virtuosic talents, which were much in evidence Friday night. But MacDonald equally challenges the orchestral musicians to take full advantage of their instruments' capabilities.

I could have left happy at the intermission,....

The Telegram, St. John's, Nfld. • Sunday, February 20, 2000

Hermes of the Stars

...it was an appealing opus, written in a mildly dissonant, accessible style. There was some energetic and exotic writing in the outer movements, but the highlight was the interior Hymn to a Deltaic God. This remarkable intermezzo, mixing frankly lyrical solo writing... with a gentle ostinato of abstract-sounding open intervals, could stand alone as an encore. Quarter-tone sequences worked nicely as special effects and the final chord was richly ambiguous.

The Gazette, Montreal • November 28, 1998

Andrew MacDonald's *Hermes of the Stars* had the upper strings on their feet, rather like a period instrument band in the throws of Baroque gesture, which the piece's veneer emulates.

MacDonald was on hand to introduce his music, explaining its bond of classical Greek influences to his own musical syntax. The work resembles a concerto grosso for strings, ...

In three sections, *Hermes of the Stars* packs a fine emotional wallop.

Winnipeg Free Press • Thursday, March 18, 1999

Pleiades Variations

MacDonald's *Pleiades Variations* was inspired by the star cluster of that name, prominent in winter skies over the northern hemisphere. In a tribute to the seven-star constellation, the piece is formally divided into seven sections, each of which is a variation on a seven-note theme. The music is serene and mysterious, as befits the subject matter.

The musicians' playing is impeccable throughout, reveling in the warm, evocative combination of these instruments. Standouts include Shulman's flawless flutter-tongue in the middle movement....

Opus (formerly Classical Music Magazine), Toronto • July 1999

In the Eagle's Eye

I was prepared to dislike this work, as there are few contemporary works which I find pleasurable as aesthetic music experiences, but I was pleasantly surprised by the quality and craftsmanship. It is well written for the instruments and the Gryphon Trio performed dazzling pyrotechnics and fervent lyricism in their performance of this colourful piece.

Nelson Daily News, Nelson, B.C. • 1996

In the Eagle's Eye, Op. 37 is a superb piece by Andrew P. MacDonald.... It is partly descriptive, but largely abstract, evoking exactly what the title suggests. Wednesday's reading was only the third performance it has received, but one can confidently predict that it will receive many more.

... I will pass up no opportunity to hear more of his music, and suggest that you do likewise.

The Ottawa Citizen • Thursday, August 8, 1996

After Dark...

After Dark... by Mr. MacDonald was a descriptive piece which fit well with recent Halloween celebrations. "Procession of the Night Things" had an ominous beginning, alternating chords in the lowest octaves of the keyboard with delicate melodic lines in the upper-most keys. Ms. Andrist's musical approach to the notes made the work accessible to all.

The Daily Gleaner, Fredericton, N.B. • Wednesday, November 4, 1992