

MACDONALD PRESS QUOTE HIGHLIGHTS

Lyrical Etudes, Book I

www.allclassicalguitar.co.uk, Chris Dumigan • November 23, 2022

These are really some of the hardest studies I have ever come across, but they are always interesting, very imaginative musically speaking, and definitely something that will improve a good player's technique even more, as they do enter into musical realms that I have not seen before.

The Triumph of Saraswati: Double Concerto No. 2

The Ottawa Citizen, Sara Grainger • November 4, 2022

You could say big orchestra sound and mythology were made for each other: after all, both are the stuff of grand proportion that often transcend time and place. The Ottawa Symphony Orchestra, a Centretown institution entertaining classical music lovers in one iteration or another since 1965, certainly knows how well the two can work together. That's why it's starting off the 2022-23 season with *Music & Mythology* on Nov. 20—and there's plenty to get excited about.

One of the major highlights of this concert, though, is sure to be the world premiere of Canadian composer Andrew Paul MacDonald's *The Triumph of Saraswati*. Inspired by the Hindu goddess of music, knowledge, art, speech, wisdom and learning, this double concerto features soloists Catherine Meunier on marimba and Shawn Mativetsky on tabla. The tabla, a pair of twin hand drums with origins on the Indian subcontinent and not an instrument typically utilized in an orchestral setting, creates an intriguing arrangement and offers a truly global experience that music lovers of all kinds will not want to miss.

Lyra and Restless City

La Scena Musicale • July/August 2022

Canadian composer Andrew Paul MacDonald has attempted something unprecedented in the two original compositions featured on the album "*Music of the City and the Stars*": a fusion of electric guitar and a string ensemble. There is a noticeable difference between the two instruments, but this is exactly why the album's overarching theme works so well.

The first concerto is *Lyra*, a seven-movement work that recounts the history of the lyre in Greek mythology. The work begins with Apollo's conception of the instrument, follows Orpheus in his many musical endeavours, and ends with Zeus's installation of a memorial to the late Orpheus. The natural echo of the string ensemble is less powerful than the amplified reverberation of the electric guitar, a distinction that allows the guitar to play the role of the lyre against the "setting" of the ensemble. This is particularly noteworthy in *Orpheus and Hades*, where the violins chime in with sharp stings to generate a hostile, foreign atmosphere.

The companion concerto *Restless City* is jazz-inspired, and more tonally complex as a result. It is not as straightforward an experience as *Lyra*, but it is still impressive for its ability to unify the disparate instruments.

Lyra and Restless City

The Whole Note, Ted Parkinson • May 20, 2022

String Quartet and jazz guitar is an unusual and intriguing combination which MacDonald has the composition skills and the guitar chops to pull off very well.

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... beautiful harmonies ... much lively interplay between the guitar and the quartet ... sometimes lighthearted and at other times intense. "Music of the City and the Stars" is a thoughtful and entrancing collaboration.

The Orchid Garden

The Ottawa Citizen, Natasha Gauthier • November 17, 2015

Saxophones are rare birds in classical music, but the stage at Southam Hall has seen a gaggle of them in the past six weeks. After sightings at NACO performances of Kurt Weill and Ravel, the sax was the star attraction at the Ottawa Symphony Orchestra Monday evening.

The program revolved around the world premiere of a concerto for tenor saxophone by Canadian composer Andrew Paul MacDonald. Entitled *The Orchid Garden*, the OSO commission is built on a familiar five-note theme by Charlie Parker and makes extensive use of improvisation.

MacDonald has created a spectacular showcase for both soloist (the astonishing Jeremy Brown) and orchestra. His writing is dense but somehow catchy, exploiting the sax's entire tonal range. The orchestration is complex, yet subtle. MacDonald's a master illusionist, combining weird effects from the woodwinds with layers of percussion to produce a kind of elusive "third sound," making you wonder how it's done. The lush slow movement is especially evocative, like Ravel on a tropical island vacation. Brown's performance was a dazzling display of classical discipline and agility combined with a jazz artist's freedom and sense of exploration. To get through the piece's marathon fluttering phrases, Brown uses circular breathing — essentially inhaling through his nose while exhaling through his mouth, an advanced, prized technique that never fails to impress.

Mary's Wedding

Opera Magazine (UK), Bernard Jacobson • March, 2012

MacDonald has set the unpretentiously eloquent libretto to music that is essentially tonal but which vividly captures both the lyricism of young love and the brutality of war without descending to mawkishness or rodomontade. The wordsetting, too, is clear and idiomatic.

Mary's Wedding

Monday Magazine, Mary Ellen Green • November 16, 2011

Though the whole opera is set in Mary's dream, the setting often changes — from the field where the two young lovers met, to the front lines of the war. Set designer Ian Rye deserves accolades for the creation of a very versatile set, featuring three undulating ramps which effectively portray the vastness of the Canadian prairies, the expanse of the Atlantic Ocean and the abysmal craters of no-man's land on the front lines of battle.

But the set doesn't bring you there on its own. The music, by award-winning Canadian composer Andrew P. MacDonald, seamlessly moves from one scene to another forming a complete continuous piece with love themes and battle songs intertwined. The augmented percussion section is a welcome addition and an essential part of bringing the battle scenes to life.

The chorus and the principle role of Sergeant Flowerdew (bass Alain Coulombe) are thoughtful additions on the behalf of MacDonald, who uses both to add layers and texture to the whole. The chorus allows some of the supporting characters who are only

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mentioned in the play a chance to shine in the opera, bringing Mary's neighbours and Charlie's comrades to life.

Mary's Wedding

The Victoria Times Colonist, Kevin Bazzana • November 12, 2011

A devoted servant of the drama, his [MacDonald's] music responds nimbly and vividly to both text and subtext. *Mary's Wedding* is the first work Pacific Opera Victoria can really call its own, having been intimately involved in its development from the commission, in 2008, to the première, which took place Thursday evening at the McPherson Playhouse. The company's hands-on attention has resulted in an opera that it can be proud of and that merits a future in the repertory.

It is based on Stephen Massicotte's popular 2002 play of the same name, set in Saskatchewan in 1920 and dramatizing the dreams of Mary, who, on the eve of her wedding, remembers her first love, the farmboy Charlie, and the letters he sent her while serving during the First World War in France, where he died in battle.

Massicotte himself crafted a libretto that is eventful but also tight and well-paced, if not especially poetic or melody-friendly, and composer Andrew Paul MacDonald, working in an accessible, versatile tonal idiom, has been a devoted servant of the drama, his music responding nimbly and vividly to both text and subtext.

It helps that MacDonald, whose oeuvre comprises mostly instrumental music, is a skilful, imaginative orchestrator, able to deploy a generous palette of tonal colours in often busy accompaniments, without smothering or drawing focus from the voices. In the pit, three dozen members of the Victoria Symphony (three of them manning an unusually large percussion battery) are conducted with passion and deep commitment by POV artistic director Timothy Vernon.

There is a portion of merely workaday recitative here and there, especially during expository passages, but as the drama becomes more complicated and emotionally urgent, the music becomes more interesting, original and compelling. There are ardent surges of lyricism underscoring the romance of Mary and Charlie, several elegiac episodes and some impressively powerful specimens of battle music. The level of musical inspiration actually seems to rise as the opera progresses and is especially high at the end of each act.

The story takes place within Mary's mind, so the action moves often and quickly between times and places; in MacDonald's score, these transitions are convincing and seamless. One also detects, at times, the outlines of conventional operatic numbers - arias, duets and, most obviously, big choral set pieces.

Indeed, the 20-person chorus gets some of the most effective music in the opera. It was MacDonald's decision to add a chorus to *Mary's Wedding*, to embody minor characters only mentioned in the play, and the opera seems frankly inconceivable without it: It brings welcome variety of texture, both dramatically and musically, without compromising the essential intimacy of the story.

After Dark...

Stephen Brookes, Washington D.C., • September 19, 2011

The Verge Ensemble, one of the region's most eclectic new-music groups, took a slight, um, verge away from its usual multi-instrumental, multimedia programs on Sunday afternoon to focus only on piano music. But the program also underscored how diverse the piano music of the past half-century has been, from the mathematical rigor of Karlheinz Stockhausen to the evocative tone-painting of Canadian composer Andrew

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MacDonald. And despite its title, MacDonald's "After Dark" was no dreamy nocturne; this was a wild romp through an imagined world that comes alive in the moonlight, given a spectacular reading by Audrey Andrist.

Violin Concerto

The Ottawa Citizen, Richard Todd • November 17, 2010

Two pieces by Canadian composers, and guess what? Each was well received by the Ottawa Symphony's audience Monday evening. First was the Carnival Overture by Oskar Morawetz (1917-2007), who spent virtually all of his working life in Toronto. This piece was written just for the fun of it, with no expectation of having it performed. Happily, it came to the attention of conductor Sir Ernest MacMillan, who premiered it on Dominion Day 1946. It's a well-crafted, cheery piece, if a little short of being memorable. Conductor David Currie led a well-played and spirited account.

Next came a piece that was memorable without qualification, Andrew P. MacDonald's 1991 Violin Concerto. MacDonald, born in 1958, is a well-established composer whose music is frequently performed. It is in the traditional three movements, but with some differences. The first movement follows a slow-fast-slow scheme and since the movements are connected by cadenzas the concerto comes across almost like a symphonic poem. The orchestration is first-rate and the solo part is frequently dazzling. Happily, violinist Robert Uchida seemed entirely on top of its considerable technical and musical demands. Conductor Currie led the orchestra in a well-focused accompaniment, also no small achievement.

Violin Concerto

The Ottawa Citizen • November 14, 2010

Robert Uchida will join the 100-piece Ottawa Symphony Orchestra and conductor David Currie at the National Arts Centre Nov. 15 to perform Canadian composer Andrew MacDonald's Violin Concerto. The 1991 piece won a Juno Award and has a personal connection for Uchida, who raves about the work.

MacDonald wrote the piece in 1991 for violinist David Stewart, who taught Uchida at the University of Ottawa School of Music and is concertmaster of the Ottawa Symphony. When the piece was recorded, it won the 1995 Juno award for best classical composition.

Uchida, who since 2006 has been concertmaster of Symphony Nova Scotia, performed the concerto with that orchestra last season. He says he considers it "one of the greatest Canadian pieces written for solo violin. This concerto has everything - from incredible virtuosic writing to sheer depth, lyricism and beauty. The orchestration is outstanding! It was written for and premiered by my former teacher David Stewart and the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra in 1991 so it certainly has a special place in my heart. I am delighted to share it with the Ottawa audience."

Ode to the West Wind

Janet Berkman, Toronto • February 28, 2010

The second piece was commissioned by the TSO specifically for this series, the theme of which was "Music Inspired by Words". Composer Andrew Paul MacDonald took Shelley's Ode to the West Wind and set the music around it. Literally. Actor Colm Feore read the poem during the piece, the words having been set into the score. Feore was "conducted", his voice another instrument in the orchestra. It was very effective... Feore was miked, and the music very definitely supported this lovely, well-known

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poem. MacDonald spoke about this commission briefly before the performance which added to the audience's understanding of the process and way that he had represented various elements of the poem musically.

Shuffletown Blue

Voir, Mathieu Petit • 2007

Fully charged jazz that never lets up.

Shuffletown Blue

The Sherbrooke Record, Mike McDevitt • 2007

The band is free-flowing and wildly creative...this first release provides a pleasant and enthusiastic blend of several different styles adding up to a wonderful sampling of accessible jazz fusion. Check these guys out.

Double Concerto No. 1

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

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.

Double Concerto No. 1

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

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

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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...

Pleiades Variations:

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

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...

Hermes of the Stars

Winnipeg Free Press • Thursday, March 18, 1999

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.

Hermes of the Stars

The Gazette, Montreal • November 28, 1998

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.

In the Eagle's Eye:

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

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.

In the Eagle's Eye:

The Ottawa Citizen • Thursday, August 8, 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.

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

Violin Concerto

The Montreal Gazette, Arthur Kaptainis • April 6, 1996

The opening with its horns both creates a strong atmosphere and gets the thematic discourse rolling. There is an earthy, peasant-flavored entry for the solo violin, craftily supported by the orchestra. At last, a Canadian composer for whom the expression 'well orchestrated' is not a euphemism for 'musically empty'. The tranquil second movement is effortlessly sustained, while a trace of Gypsy blood can be heard in the finale, with its angular rhythms. Violin writing is tough but idiomatic, with cadenzas that sound touched a bit by Ravel, a bit by Ysaye. Canadian music? Well, we'll take it.

Violin Concerto

Fanfare, Issue 19:1 • September-October, 1995

MacDonald's Violin Concerto, begun in 1987 and completed in 1991, sparkles with life, both in its brilliant writing for the soloist and its imaginative use of orchestral colour. If you want a parallel, my feeling is that MacDonald's work has a closely-related uncle in the form of the Walton concerto: it shares the same sun-dappled textures, the same pervasive lyricism, the same concern with clarity. It is instantly appealing and ought to find favour with audiences wherever it is performed.

After Dark....:

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

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.

In the Garden of Gæa

The Toronto Star • March 26, 1991

The title of Andrew P. MacDonald's *In the Garden of Gæa* suggested a more earthbound view-Gæa being the goddess of the earth-but his eye was fixed on the bloody legends of the Titans, the Cyclopes, and Uranus, from whom sprang the lovely Aphrodite. No music could possibly tell that story, yet there is a narrative thrust to the work, and musical motifs that might well have been character-sketches. The pleasure in this work lay in MacDonald's feeling for orchestral texture, which he expressed with considerable power.

Violin Concerto

The Winnipeg Free Press • December 11, 1991

MacDonald's enormously impressive Violin Concerto received its world premiere Tuesday evening from violinist David Stewart, with the MCO guest-conducted by Susan Haig, and on every count it showed itself as a work of character and quality. MacDonald's syntax has that same sort of swashbuckling optimism Walton shows in his Violin Concerto, along with a similarly concentrated use of the orchestra where each melodic fragment has real relevance to the overall texture. The work is

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boldly scored, with the solo line felicitously virtuosic yet integrated into the whole, giving the sense of a taughtly symphonic structure throughout its three-sectioned single movement. There are influences but these are mixed to suggest a peculiarly individual landscape where sustained, slower moving colors are frequently found changing behind passages of much animation. Although the tone of the work is lean and muscular overall, there is plenty of appealingly Romantic sweep, but it is so skillfully managed that one never senses imbalances of mood or intent.

Songs of Life's Complaint

The Omaha World-Herald • February 8, 1988

The work, in total, was audacious, richly textured and as romantic in its way as the poems which inspired it.

Songs of Life's Complaint

The Winnipeg Free Press • March 16, 1988

The most interesting work of the evening was the Canadian premiere of Songs of Life's Complaint by Canadian composer Andrew MacDonald. Dramatic and forceful, it powerfully communicated a feeling of anguish. The composer, who was present for the performance, has written some brilliant music for a large orchestra that makes a highly personal statement. It would be difficult to be unmoved by feelings of despair expressed by the composer.

Excursions for Flute Alone

The Winnipeg Free Press • April 10, 1986

Intellectual weight tipped the balance at last night's concert, with only Andrew P. MacDonald's Excursions for Flute Alone providing something light. KeriLynn Wilson provided the zest to make the puckish work playful and charming. Her performance was such that Excursions inspires images that are at once lyrical and phantasmagorical.