

UBC Symphony Orchestra

UBC Students Provide Glorious Finale to Super Season

Only youth, enthusiasm, dedication (that is, practice), and love of music could have wrought such a perfect end to The Kelowna Community Concert Association's magnificent 2006-2007 season.

Saturday's Concert at the Kelowna Community Theatre was not just the KCCA finale, but it also marked the end of the academic year for the UBC orchestra. The atmosphere in the theatre had a poignancy that often accompanies the passing of something extraordinary.

The Symphony Orchestra of the University of BC consists of music majors in pursuit of careers in music. This partly accounts for the high level of musicianship as compared to most other student orchestras.

The ensemble's principal director, Jesse Read, is not only a noted bassoonist but also the UBC music school's current director. Read's conducting style fits his academic position: textbook perfect and understated. But the resulting music might well have been the product of the most charismatic wielder of the baton.

For a group possessing about double the number of strings as our local orchestra, the sound was amazingly free from muddiness. The orchestra's transparency in the contrapuntal passages particularly impressed me. The unison within each of the sections was also remarkable, as was the overall precision.

The foregoing analysis hints at what happened Saturday in the theatre, but you had to be there to experience how the whole exceeded the sum of its parts.

The program led off with Gabriel Fauré's *Sicillienne*, probably the best-known part of his opera, *Pelleas et Melisande*.

Less well known (but featured in the Okanagan Symphony's January concert) was Maurice Ravel's homage to Francois Couperin, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. Ravel's impressionistic harmonies applied to baroque dance melodies produced some unexpectedly lush sonorities.

Next came Alexander Glazunov's *Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra in E-flat* performed by master-degree candidate Kristan Kuntz. It's probably safe to say that not one person in a hundred was familiar with this single-movement work, and yet the end result was eminently listenable.

Kuntz's saxophone timbre is beautifully round and smooth, and her fantastic breath control left many of us gasping. For this number, associate conductor John van Deursen led the orchestra.

After the intermission, Jesse Read returned to the podium to conduct Felix Mendelssohn's ever-popular *Italian Symphony (Opus 90)*. Mendelssohn was a mere 24 years old when he penned this work, and his youthful spirit seemed to invigorate and magnify that of the orchestra's youngsters.

I had never heard the opening *vivace* and ending *saltarello* of the *Italian* taken at such breakneck speed, but the musicians enunciated the notes as evenly and clearly as a string of pearls. It was electric. At the final chord, the audience leaped to its feet and burst into cheers of *bravo*.

Congratulations and thanks to KCCA's executive, directors, and volunteers for bringing us this unsurpassed slate of concerts.