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Monday, 12 July 2010

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Young People’s Concert Series - *Canadian Horizon*



Review by Kamara Hennessey

April 17, 2010

Exploring the Americas, Musical Discoveries Part 11 in the Young People’s Concert Series at the RBG, started its musical journey in November 22/ 09 in Argentina and returned northwards arriving today on its home turf. And what better way to bring the 2009 /10 series to a close than by spotlighting some remarkable 20th and 21st C’s Canadian composer’s works that were performed by some outstanding young Canadian performers on stage to illuminate this great land’s musical horizon.

Pianist -Composer, **Frank Horvat** is given the





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Young People's
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pleasure of introducing the program. He provides a very articulate and informative historical background on influences that gave Canadian Composers the opportunity to help create their own contemporary idiomatic statements.

It is also well noted that in the evolution of music in Canada, today's Canadian composers have no barriers or restrictions in their creative output. He uses himself as a 'no holds barred' example to what the audience will experience later on in the performances of six of his own works that concluded the program. In *Great House of Riffs* **Horvat** incorporates a blend of rock, jazz, swing, blues, classical stylings. Inspired by global social and economic concerns, he is urged as a composer to translate identifiable empathetic emotions into music. Clearly in his focused performance of *Poverty*, *Zee Zoo Snaps*, *Working with the Sun* one does witness that he is a guy who, without inhibition, can 'wear his emotions on his sleeves'. Although a birthed Canadian from the nation's Capital, I believe **Horvat's** Hungarian ethnicity allows for a Lisztian archetype at the piano. His music is critically acclaimed as having vigorous, rhythmic energy. Works defined as minimalist in stature, their rhythms and tempi exhibit his virtuosity at the piano. And as he declares during Q& A period, he is most himself (away from the compositional process) when he's given a combination of notational choices from his audience to improvise on the spot. *Improvisation* in his repertory provided him with this revealing opportunistic moment. In support of 'saving our planet' through environmental issues raised for change, **Horvant** is currently on his National *Green Keys Tours* - March 2010 - 2011.

Seventeen year old, **David Wang** was first on the program to present Barbara Pentland's (considered a renegade CC in her time in the early 20thC) *Studies*

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in Line. In this four short movement work, I detected a somewhat mature sensitivity in **Wang's** performance in the Largo and Andante Tranquillo movements. He was quite technically fluent in fast passages in the Allegretto and Presto. From the very expressive sounding out of the first word, I am reeled in by **Alicia Ault's** performance of Gladys Davenport's musically set text in *Cool Silent is the Lake*. Together with piano accompanist **Olga Tcherniak**, they both set the tone in this work, as well as the other *Remembrance* - by the above composer also - for this listener to react with welled up, but controlled, tears along with an overall tingling sensation. Linda Fletcher's *Old Irish Blessing* along with the above two works I thought suited **Ault's** demure persona. Therefore, they were good choices for a varied concert program.

It takes an individual with equal gumption to tackle a work that defies the norm in compositional aesthetics and expectations as it does to perform it with the composer's intent in mind. **Diana Dumlavwalla** dramatic performance of the *Warrior* and *Memories of an Ancient Garden* from Alexina Louie's large scale work *Scenes from a Jade Terrace*. Like so many avant-garde piano works produced in the 20 / 21st Cs, the whole is greater than the sum of its part. Therefore, one needs to have the aural and visual experience in a live concert setting to appreciate the sonorous magnitude arising from the instrument at the performer's hands. I was quite impressed with Dumlavwalla's confidence to deliver it as such, especially in the *Warrior* movement. For those whose ears are conditioned to the sweeter sounds of the Classical master, Louie's work would have presented its challenges to a discerning individual's aural preference.