

## Masterpieces create magical and memorable symphonic contrast

By Kenneth DeLong April 30, 2010



CPO Classic Masterpieces

James Campbell, clarinet

Matthais Bamert, conductor

It is a rare concert when Mozart gets to play the old man, but this was the case at the CPO's Classics Series concert Thursday night. The two major works on the program were Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, written two months before the composer's early death at age 35, and the *Symphonie Fantastique* by Berlioz, composed when he was only 27. Both are staples of the concert repertoire, and with their sharply contrasting styles made for a highly enjoyable evening of symphonic music.

Of particular interest was the appearance of Canadian clarinetist James Campbell as the soloist in the Mozart concerto. Campbell is no stranger to Calgarians, but his visits are always welcome, for he is a clarinetist of the first order. The Mozart concerto is a party piece for all serious clarinetists, a work requiring purity of tone, flexibility of technique, and a sense of 18th-century elegance. All these things and more are what one has come to expect from Campbell, and on this occasion he delivered in spades.

The concerto was beautifully played throughout, the running passages fluid and gracious, and the wit of the final movement pointed and sharp. Campbell plays an exquisite tone, and it was a treat to bask in playing of this refinement. With the orchestra providing a mellifluous accompaniment, this was a performance to treasure and remember.

The concert was notable too for its guest conductor Matthais Bamert. Bamert is well known worldwide, especially for his extensive recordings on the prestigious Chandos label, and for his eclectic repertoire. Known particularly for his recordings of 20th-century music and 18th-century symphonies, he nevertheless appeared quite at home in the Berlioz, leading the orchestra in an exceptionally clean and polished account of this familiar blockbuster.

Bamert is not particularly histrionic as a conductor, but he certainly knows his business. Throughout the entire evening the orchestra gave the strong impression of being in its comfort zone—of being able to concentrate fully on the delivery of the music, confident that the man with the baton would be there for them when needed. Exhuding calm competence and with excellent stick technique, Bamert led the orchestra in an expert fashion, the textures well balanced, the total sound beautifully balanced and steady. There was also excitement when needed, not the least in the impressive final movement, which also featured some fine E-flat clarinet playing by the orchestra's Steve Amsel.

The evening included a work entitled *Perennials* by the German-Canadian composer Michael Oesterle. Cleverly written, with attractive ideas that are clearly and logically developed, *Perennials* made a good impression and was well received by the audience. While the idiom of the music was fairly traditional, the work is by no means stale, and the quality of the writing suggests that Oesterle is a composer of consequence.

With Bamert as the concert's guest, I would be remiss in not mentioning that in England he is so associated with new music that he is the center of an hilarious spoof on the music of modern Viennese composers. Just enter Bamert and Schoenberg into YouTube for a joke-filled three minutes. The concert will be repeated Saturday evening.