

Guest conductor pushes the beat all evening

Jazzy program
opens pops series

CONCERT REVIEW

The Edmonton
Symphony presents The
Robbins Pops series

Conductor: Bruce Hangen
Artists: James Campbell, clarinet;
Fred Buda, drums
When: Friday and Saturday
Where: Winspear Centre

BILL RANKIN
Journal Entertainment Writer
EDMONTON

The Edmonton Symphony
came out swinging Friday night
in its opening Robbins Pops concert
of the season.

Guest conductor Bruce Hangen
is a veteran of the pioneering
Boston Pops, and he gave the audience
a good taste of what the
mini-Proms, American-style,

feels like.

Hangen pushed the beat all evening, which generated its own extra energy. In the opening piece, John Estacio's *Bootlegger's Tarantella*, Hangen asked for tempos faster than I've heard in the two performances the ESO has given of the piece in the past month, and he almost lost the group a couple of times, but Estacio's piece is so exciting, it's understandable how someone could get overexcited by it. Conductor and orchestra played together nicely after that.

The symphony tried a few new things to add pizzazz. Guest artist James Campbell made his first appearance unannounced, in the spotlight, standing at the top of the choir loft behind the stage. Campbell's clarinet sound is so perfect, it was great to hear him open with the eerie *Nightmare* by Artie Shaw. With a relentless rumbling accompaniment from the darker side of the orchestra and guest drummer Fred Buda holding the ominous beat, Camp-

bell blew the roof off.

The evening had a lot of jazzy flavour, but Campbell was also allowed a few classical moments with the delightful rondo from Weber's first clarinet concerto and an arrangement of the exotic *Piece en forme de habanera* by Ravel.

He also joined forces with three ESO clarinetists for Leroy Anderson's *Clarinet Candy*. A cute idea that worked beautifully.

The evening was modelled on the Boston Pops' eclectic programming, and there was plenty of variety. The orchestra found all the Broadway vitality in the splendid Don Rose arrangement of Gershwin's rough-and-tumble *Strike Up the Band Overture*, which the crowd loved. And the ESO gave an entertaining performance of Harold Arlen's *I Love a Parade*.

The centrepiece of the concert was Allan Gilliland's new concerto *Dreaming of the Masters*, written for Campbell. The opening Gershwin clarinet glissando from

Rhapsody in Blue set a very high standard, which the first movement didn't live up to. It is melodically rambling, without a line that strongly defines its intention. But giving ESO bassist John Taylor some stand-up jazz work to do throughout certainly helped create the mood Gilliland was aiming for.

Campbell "sang" the ballad-like middle movement with gorgeous control of the low register, and Gilliland used the cellos, violas and second violins in this part to great supporting effect.

The last movement was a reminder of what the jazziest mid-20th-century clarinet sound was. If Bird and the rest of the bebop saxophone magicians had cornered the market, we might have heard a lot more of what Gilliland's piece recalled.

The evening ended with several encores and a burst of streamers covering the orchestra as red and white balloons drifted from the ceiling.

brankin@thejournal.canwest.com

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