

Passionate performance by conductor, clarinetist leaves crowd gushing

By Colleen Johnston For the Record

Among the comments overheard while leaving Centre in the Square on Friday following the Kitchener Waterloo Symphony Masterpiece Concert were 'Excellent,' 'I just love that piece,' and 'What a great conductor.'

Referring to the performance of Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2 in e Minor by the KWS under the direction of Chosei Komatsu, the comments stand for the entire program.

For an enthusiastic 82 per cent house, Komatsu, the KWS and guest artist clarinetist James Campbell delivered a program of interest, quality and artistry.

And it was a night for slow movements. While other segments were fine, the Adagios from both Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A, K. 622 and the Rachmaninoff were exquisite.

Often the most lyrical and tender music of a large work, slow movements can contain gorgeous melodies and these works are no exception.

But the empathy and cooperation that went on between Campbell, Komatsu and individual musicians in the Mozart Adagio was breathtaking.

Never gushy or peevish, Campbell's sound is instead elegant, restrained, graceful. And it's remarkable how many voices and timbres he can draw from his clarinet.

In the Mozart Adagio, there's a pivotal descending line. It doesn't beg out to be a little sad, but Campbell consistently played it without vibrato, in the clearest, most melancholy of voices. The result was that the piece was transformed and this little important cell turned what might simply have been a pretty movement into a masterpiece.

It was moving to see Komatsu and Campbell exchange a glance during this — a glance which spoke volumes about them being of the same mind and both rediscovering the genius and complexity and subtlety of Mozart together.

The outer two movements of the Mozart were beautifully played, and this is no surprise, as Campbell is internationally recognized as outstanding.

The opening was not cheery or even dainty, yet its polished sunniness was delightful.

The final movement which demands huge range leaps and lots of dexterity sounded easy as can be with Campbell in control.

Backed up by a more resplendent orchestral sound than one might expect for Mozart, the choices were all superb.

Komatsu also proved ingenious in his uninhibited performance of Polish-Canadian composer Peter Paul Koprowski's tone poem Saga. Calling back ancient Nordic folklore, this work reflects a well-grounded, mature composer who has a thorough grasp of orchestral techniques.

Suspense and a sense of timelessness pervade the opening. The gradual build of the materials is much like Wagner, yet for some time there is no counterpoint. But the orchestration is bold and brassy and percussion, especially in a wistful music box segment, expressive and shape-providing.

Written to feature individual players of the KWS as well as the orchestra as a whole, this work, commissioned by the KWS, is powerful, original, visceral.

The final work, Rachmaninoff's intense second symphony, simply stole the show.

From a frightening, foreboding opening Largo to the giddy delight at the close, Komatsu was in firm and mighty control.

Conducting from memory, it was clear he has a special bond with this mesmerizing romantic music.

This is seething, bodice-ripping stuff and Komatsu is himself ablaze with the passionate score.

If any of this type of music appeals to you, don't miss this concert! It's fabulous!

This Masterpiece Concert repeats tonight at Centre in the Square at 8 pm.

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