

**Exciting news from the BUZZ team! Our website is getting a facelift!**

You may find some items out of place as we make the transition, so please bear with us.

## Review: PEI Symphony Orchestra

### On Fire

Review by Ivy Wigmore

On October 21, the PEI Symphony Orchestra blazed into its 51st season with a performance entitled "Exquisite Fires," under the direction of conductor Mark Shapiro. We heard good news immediately: For the first time in many years, the PEISO is out of debt, and that means that those dedicated and wonderful musicians have gotten a much-deserved raise. Bravo!

"Exquisite," I thought, "is a bold promise." But the PEISO did not disappoint. First up on the incendiary programme was Haydn's Fire Symphony. Maestro Shapiro rhapsodized about the composer's playful and creative mind and confessed that, were he to spend eternity with a single wit, it would be Haydn. This symphony is not the one nicknamed the Surprise Symphony — that would be No. 94 — but this Symphony No. 59 does not lack unexpected elements. Haydn had a few tricks up his sleeve, which included unanticipated notes, instrumentation and rests. The Fire Symphony is lovely and lively; Haydn's surprises amuse and sharpen our ears throughout, a little like musical palate refreshers.

Linda Bouchard's "Exquisite Fires" made a striking contrast with the Haydn. And yet, as the Maestro noted, the compositions share "a certain luminosity of mind and narrative purpose." Bouchard wrote the nine-movement suite as the first composer-in-residence for the National Arts Centre Orchestra in the early nineties. The composer has dedicated a great deal of effort to furthering the appreciation of what is called *new music*, an offshoot of the classical tradition that seeks non-traditional means of expanding its boundaries. Here's how Bouchard describes her approach: "My work is often inspired by nature's geometry, structure and textures. As if writing music could begin by staring with a magnifying glass at nature's elements: water-gas-rock formations-chemical reactions, creating from these images a series of abstract landscapes. I seek to express emotional experiences in their most raw form, without a literal or narrative setting."

In her excellent *Symphony Preview*, violinist Margo Connors (Look her up on Facebook!) offers good advice for listeners unfamiliar with new music: "The trick... is to not listen for tunes, but to hear an overall effect... sit back and let yourself be affected." I was not sitting back, however, but rather forward as the piece was so engaging. Bouchard says that she wrote inspired by Medieval Love Myths, and was happy to find a theme that supported the kind of excess she wanted to indulge in. As such, "Exquisite Fires" is imbued with romance, passion and a mystical quality. I was reminded, too, of the interplay of ambient sounds created in the world, both natural and human-made, the way they seem unconnected and yet, listened to in an open way, can present as a harmonious and beautiful whole. "Exquisite Fires" was fantastic.

The fiery theme of the programme was completed, post-intermission, with Dvorak's ravishing Cello Concerto in B Minor. As much as I loved "Exquisite Fires" — and I loved it a lot — it's the Cello Concerto on loop in my head today. Soloist Denise Djokic, who joined the PEISO for this performance, was amazing. Djokic is a powerful and passionate musician; every note and nuance was eloquent and her apparent immersion in the music was inspiring. Here's a short list of Djokic's accomplishments: She played Bach at the 2002 Grammy Awards and was named among the top 25 Canadians Who Are Changing Our World by Maclean's Magazine. Elle Magazine included her in its list of Canada's Most Powerful Women.

What can I say about the orchestra? There's really only one way to put it: They were on fire. And the whole performance? "Exquisite" is not too strong a word.

» [Lighthouse Willie](#)

