

REVIEWS

International musicians perform at Club musical concert

CASSANDRA KERWIN
CASSANDRA@QCTONLINE.COM

Classical music enthusiasts filled the Palais Montcalm concert hall on Feb. 11 for the Club musical de Québec concert featuring Russian pianist Alexander Melnikov, German violinist Isabelle Faust and French cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras, who performed works by Robert Schumann, Elliott Carter and Johannes Brahms.

The concert included a pre-show lecture about the lives and works of the three composers. Audience members learned about how Schumann found inspiration in his challenging life to create romantic masterpieces; how the young Brahms' friendship with Schumann and his wife Clara inspired him to compose his trio for piano, violin and cello; and how it took Carter 90 years

to create his works inspired by the 20th century.

Faust, Melnikov and Queyras opened the concert with Schumann's highly emotional Trio for piano, violin and cello, No. 2 in F major, op. 80, written in 1847. The three musicians moved with the music and felt every note. After learning about the loss of the Schumanns' one-year-old son Emil during the pre-show lecture, one could imagine Robert and Clara's grief in the foreground with the sounds of life moving on in the background. The piece starts with light touches and becomes more and more aggressive as it moves into the second movement. The notes seem to explode under the fingers of the musicians. The third movement acts as a bridge into the fourth movement, where Schumann guides the musicians to a satisfactory ending. It was an outstanding performance.

Faust, Melnikov and Queyras

then jumped 150 years ahead to 2012, when American ultra-modernist composer Elliott Carter finished his final oeuvre just months before he died at the age of 103. *Epigrams* for violin, cello and piano is a series of 12 movements that are seemingly better suited as a science-fiction movie score. The long, high-pitched notes of the cello and violin interrupted by well-placed piano notes remind spectators of eerie moments on the silver screen. Toward the end of *Epigrams*, the pace increases, creating more intrigue. It was clear that this incredible masterpiece was composed by someone who had witnessed and experienced the entire 20th century. Faust, Melnikov and Queyras did it justice.

After intermission, Faust, Melnikov and Queyras performed Brahms' joyfully energetic Trio for piano, violin and cello No. 1 in B major, op. 8. Brahms composed this



Photo by Cassandra Kerwin

German violinist Isabelle Faust, Russian pianist Alexander Melnikov and French cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras gave an outstanding concert at the Palais Montcalm on Feb. 11 as part of the Club musical concert series.

piece during the early months of his relationship with the Schumanns in 1853-54 when Brahms, then 20, had been spending much of his time in their family home filled with

children, music and creativity. Through the performance, spectators felt Brahms' positive energy, even 170 years later.

When the concert concluded,

Faust, Melnikov and Queyras received a long and well-deserved standing ovation, after which they generously played an encore.

Two orchestras and a choir perform an outstanding symphony

SHIRLEY NADEAU
SHIRLEY@QCTONLINE.COM

It was practically standing room only onstage at the Grand Théâtre on Feb. 28 as the Orchestre symphonique de Québec was joined by the National Arts Centre (NAC) Orchestra from Ottawa and the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, directed by Alexander Shelley.

The stage had to be extended both at the back and

the front to accommodate the approximately 200 musicians. Some concertgoers who had purchased tickets in Row D (known for its extra legroom) were surprised to find themselves sitting just below the front of the stage.

The evening opened with award-winning Canadian composer Kelly-Marie Murphy's *Dark Stars, Bright Nights, Vast Universe* which was commissioned by the NAC Orchestra in 2023 as a response to

Richard Strauss's iconic tone poem, *Don Juan*. Murphy was inspired by Vincent van Gogh's painting *Starry Night* to create the ethereal work which she describes as a "modern sonic tapestry."

Another award-winning musician, 18-year-old Canadian pianist Kevin Chen, then joined forces with the orchestra to play Camille Saint-Saëns' breathtaking Piano Concerto No. 2 ... a match made in classical music heaven.

After a brief intermission, the 98-voice Toronto Mendelssohn Choir joined the two orchestras onstage to sing Quebec composer Jacques Hétu's Symphony No. 5, which

portrays Paris before, during and after the 1940 Nazi invasion and ends with a choral setting of Paul Éluard's poem *Liberté*, celebrating the liberation of the French capital

from four long years of German occupation. Hétu died just three weeks before the world première of this epic work by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in 2010.



Photo by Shirley Nadeau

The musicians of the Orchestre Symphonique de Québec, the National Arts Centre Orchestra and the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir (barely visible behind the musicians) prepared by artistic director Jean-Sébastien Vallée (left) and directed by Alexander Shelley (right), take a bow at the end of their outstanding performance at the Grand Théâtre.



Photo by Shirley Nadeau

Canadian pianist Kevin Chen wowed the audience with his breathtaking rendition of Saint-Saëns' Piano Concerto No. 2.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Arts: Digital Toolbox

practical tools and strategies to **empower** organizations and individuals looking to **enhance inclusivity** in their practices.

State of the Arts:
Equity Diversity Inclusion

Research.
Collaboration.
Action.

www.quebec-elan.org/editoolbox

elan
english language
arts network