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## **VSO season opens with a flourish**

### **Bright lights, big show**

BY DAVID GORDON DUKE, SPECIAL TO THE SUN SEPTEMBER 27, 2010

On Saturday evening the Vancouver Symphony began its season at the Orpheum with a French program of flash and fireworks. Despite the obvious glitter of a Saint-Saens/Ravel double bill, this was something of a departure from conventional programming and, just perhaps, an intriguing harbinger of some fresh ideas and attitudes.

The evening began with Saint-Saens' Coronation March, French pomp for the very British circumstance of the coronation of Edward VII. Even in such a throwaway piece d'occasion, Saint-Saens is a conscientious craftsman, and it is representative of Bramwell Tovey's way of building programs to tuck such an unfamiliar sparkler into his playlist.

Next up was Saint-Saens' Fifth Piano Concerto, The Egyptian. It's a lovely thing: a period piece in florid, late-Romantic style, and equally brilliantly crafted. Brilliant is also the byword for the performance of young Avan Yu in the solo part. Vancouver audiences have had the pleasure of watching Yu grow as a performer; the rarely programmed concerto was just right for him at this stage in his career. Yu handled its considerable technical demands with matter-of-fact assurance, and the work's emphasis on sentiment, facility, and exotic atmosphere gave him an effective (and roundly appreciated) showcase.

Orchestral splendour ended the program with the two suites from Ravel's 1912 ballet extravaganza Daphnis et Chloe. Ravel's music is easy to take, but adds up to considerably more than a loose collection of nice dance tunes and pictorial effects. Daphnis et Chloe is opulent but exacting: a sumptuous mosaic of precise details and intricate timbres that must be perfectly balanced to really come off. Tovey's willingness to present this particular work after a long summer hiatus shows supreme confidence in his ensemble, confidence that was for the most part rewarded.

Lavish workouts for large orchestra are a welcome sign that conductor and orchestra are willing to think big. Looks like both Tovey and the VSO have started the season as they mean to go on.

The concert repeats Monday at the Orpheum Theatre, 8 p.m.

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