

MSO regulars give Vancouver Symphony warm welcome

Visiting orchestra puts fresh face on some familiar specialties

By ARTHUR KAPTAINIS

Absent since 1976, the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra is probably regarded by many Montreal music fans simply as the resident orchestra of that city. MSO subscribers left Place des Arts yesterday with a more positive impression, as Bramwell Tovey led what might be called a high-end pops program with high-end pops panache.

The start was audacious: Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, a local specialty. Soft and mellifluous, the famous opening flute solo left scope for growth. Perhaps the MSO creates a more burnished sound, but Tovey and his troops made something personal of the piece - not having performed it to death.

After intermission, we heard Stravinsky's *Petrushka* in the 1947 edition, another work known to Montrealers, although not so much since the arrival of Kent Nagano. Where Charles Dutoit stressed brilliance and propulsion, Tovey relaxed. Flute and trumpet solos were easygoing. Never mind bitonality. This was a picturesque ballet, not a landmark of modernism. People even chuckled in the right places, Tovey having introduced the narrative, in French.

The concerto item was Rachmaninoff's thrice-familiar *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. Ensemble was not impeccable in the early going, but Avan Yu, a young Vancouver pianist, realized the bravura and lyricism of the solo part. He gave us an encore: Chopin's *Black Key Étude*, smartly done, although something by Rachmaninoff might have been more fitting.

Another Vancouver contribution was *The Linearity of Light*, by Jeffrey Ryan. Flutter-tonguing from the brass and tremolos from the strings signalled the onset of yet another compendium of orchestral effects with little in the way of harmony, counterpoint or - to put the matter succinctly - content.

There were two encores, Brahms's *Hungarian Dance No. 5* (which got the audience clapping along) and Elgar's *Nimrod*, offered by the music director as a token of friendship to the host orchestra and its followers. To judge by the response of the normally sedate Sunday crowd, the sentiment was reciprocated.