

Music Review: Vancouver Symphony Orchestra

By Richard Todd

Friday evening, the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra and its conductor, Bramwell Tovey, presented its contribution to the BC Scene with a concert in the National Arts Centre's Southam Hall. This was the orchestra's first appearance in Ottawa, and most of the people in the audience would agree: that's far too long.

The program opened with Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faun*, one of his most appealing compositions. Tovey led a luminously languid interpretation, redolent of the perfume of a flowered meadow on a still summer afternoon.

Every section of the orchestra made its contribution from the gossamer string sounds to the all-important wind solos. The brass and percussion were ideal as well, their slighter roles notwithstanding.

Next up was Jeffrey Ryan's *The Linearity of Light*, a considerably more effective piece than the same composer's *Violet Crumble*, which the National Arts Centre Orchestra played the night before. It's definitely a modern work, though relatively easy to follow as these things go.

Ryan was in the audience and must have been pleased with the drive, colour and passion the musicians found in his score. There was never a moment when the forward momentum flagged, and the last episode was overwhelmingly commanding.

Pianist Avan Yu joined Tovey and the orchestra in a riveting account of Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. At 21, Yu is a marvelous pianist, though it must be noted that there are a great many marvelous pianists in his generation, possibly too many.

Be that as it may, he certainly delivered the goods. The moments of caprice were light and captivating, his double-fortes resounding and the tender 17th and 18th variations wonderfully lyrical.

But Tovey and the orchestra must receive at least as much credit for the success of the performance, the best this listener has heard for many years. There were emphases here and there on brass entries, wind solos and the like that we don't normally hear.

The program ended with a sparkling account of Stravinsky's *Petruchka*, which, with its many solos, gave the players chances to shine individually, and shine they did. Conductor Tovey gave an informative and amusing talk before the performance. It undoubtedly increased many listeners' enjoyment. Beyond that, the individual episodes were so atmospheric that it wasn't very difficult to imagine the story unfolding.