

Learning From Others

by Jason Rong

How a “Westerners’ Community Concert” differs from our local orchestras, private studios, fellowship associations, chamber of commerce, and all other kinds of companies and organizations? Can you find out how many musical performances for the upcoming spring festival were there in the Chinese Canadian neighborhoods throughout the GTA? 40, this is the number I have figured out.

Performers showed up here and there in this “spring-mania”. Some of the record-breaking singers sung in 3 different places at one night. Over entertained is not only the Chinese communities in the GTA, but also the TV programs flooded by the evening art shows and live performances in mainland China. No wonder why many media urged the radio authority in China to “cutback the entertainments”.

The fatigue is caused by the bombard of the same style performances squeezed in around the Chinese New Year. As a matter of fact, in the GTA, many Chinese entertainment fans would rather purchase a ticket for a classical concert than getting to the free shows in our Chinese communities.

At the evening of last Saturday, February 28, a classical concert at Markham Theatre for the Performing Arts attracted many of the Chinese audience. Unlike our Chinese entertainment shows, the “westerners’” concert did not give out complimentary tickets. I was impressed by the box office sales of this concert. Seldom nowadays I could easily see a performance without bankable superstars, could have this impressively high ticket-sales. That brought me a consideration of how the westerners’ concert differs from ours.

The concert on February 28 was presented by the Kindred Spirits Orchestra, which was founded in 2009 in Markham. Beside some of the professional performers, there are many music students involved in the KSO’s presentations. This orchestra has a strict routine of holding rehearsals every week. Every year, the orchestra set up a season of 5 concerts, 2 out of those 5 concerts are free to the public. The concertmaster is Ye Jing, who has ever played the first violin in China Central Ballet Orchestra.

Even though the KSO is a community-based orchestra, their aspiration on seeking higher artistic standard is nothing less than the professional orchestras. The performance on February 28 was the third show in this season. The Violin Concerto in D Major by Tchaikovsky, selected excerpts from Carmen and Guiditta, the repertoire reflected that the value of this event is much higher than its \$15 to \$25 tickets.

Half of the members of KSO are professionals. Though there are gaps between KSO and some world leading orchestras, its musical expression force and sense of art are at a higher level, compare with many of local Chinese and community orchestras. The Music Director Kristian Alexander is experienced in organizing and motivating the orchestra. I did not see, usually seen in Chinese concerts, an over make-up hostess. Alexa Petrenko, a well known host of 96.3 FM

national classical radio station hosted the concert that night. Her briefings on the background of the music equipped us with abundant knowledge on classical music. No sponsors' reps, no official speeches, no photo shooting and hands shaking with government officers, the concert went on smoothly, quietly, and most important, enjoyable to us.

How can a concert be remembered by audience? The key is focusing on people. The major part of that concert was the Violin Concerto in D Major, composed by P. Tchaikovsky. There is nothing special for the Toronto Symphony or the Montreal Symphony to present this piece of music, but for a community-based organization, this would for sure be a great challenge.

The concerto was firstly composed in 1878, and is now known as the most difficult one in the top 10 violin concertos. Ye Jing graduated from China Central Music College, gained her master degree at Cincinnati, had been playing at key positions in various orchestras, presented this masterpiece. Ye immigrated to Canada in 2006, joined the KSO in 2009 and has been playing as a concertmaster till now. Not only a student of the most famous Chinese violinist, Weijian Zhao, but also academically educated in the world's best music schools, Ye Jing combined the advantages of enhanced skills and her unique understanding of the classical music esthetics. Recalled by Ye Jing, her last performance of Violin Concerto in D Major was about 20 years ago, when she was still in school. She played it just for practicing, and was accompanied by piano only. So she admits that playing with a whole orchestra, 20 years later, is really a challenge to her. Her confidence came from her enthusiastic and her hard working on rehearsals every week.

Hou Yijia, according to my memory, was the last Chinese female violinist who played the Violin Concerto in D Major, in GTA. Ye Jing is the second one. Ye acclaimed that of all the violinists who ever played this concerto, David Oistrakh is always her favorite. The pure Russian taste, the perfect skills, and the beautiful sense of music are the goals that Ye Jing would love to bring to her audience.

Her performance was successful, though sometimes there were some bugs, it reached her ideal level. There are 3 movements in this concerto. The first movement is fairly long, lasts about 20 minutes. Ye Jing was a bit nervous at the beginning. The music sounded hard and tightened. But as the music flew, she began to be herself.

The well-known hard cadenza was played crystal clear and tempo moved to the right pace. In the second movement, the canzonetta brought out strong Slavic melodies explored with her bow. In the last movement, her spiccato marked her playing as a fabulous one, resonant and deeply committed.

After intermission, excerpts from Carmen and Guidetta, heated up the theatre again. The conductor Alexander acted as a key person in the performance. He has prevailed his talent to lead the orchestra in this level. As a concert for community, audience could enjoy violin concerto, symphony and opera all together. At last, I heard all audience and the orchestra played Radetsky March together. It brought the concert to an end, with endless Bravos and applauds.