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MUSIC

Cellist Haimovitz helps concert live up to Garden of Eden name

By: Gwenda Nemerofsky
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What's In History? When it comes to live Sunday News, the choice was totally apropos. The concert offered a veritable cornucopia of musical surprises -- most of them pleasant. One of the best has to be the stunning playing of Mont real cellist Matt Haimovitz. This commanding performer brings credibility to everything he plays -- even breathing life into less inspiring works.

His presentation of Paul Moravec's

Mark Twain Sez gave us a taste of music written with a strong dash of humour. Haimovitz prefaced each movement with an eccentric quote from Twain, then interpreted each section accordingly. With amazing control over his instrument, he executed precise articulation, sprawling double stops, sweeping phrases and stormy motifs interrupted by pinpoint pizzicato. There is nothing this ponytailed artist can't achieve with his cello.

He did his best with Luna Pearl Woolf's enigmatic *Sarabande*, but even Haimovitz couldn't turn this one around. Stark and grating, its harshness offered little to redeem itself.

Ana Sokolovic's *Vez*, on the other hand, was a vigorous piece of perpetual motion, with strumming, incredibly rich low notes and eerie echoes depicting strife, new life, struggle and hope as clearly as day.

Concertmaster Gwen Hoebig was at her absolute best -- opening and closing the concert with dazzling performances. Her masterful rendering of Sophie Eckhardt-Gramatté's *Violin Caprice No. 7* was rich with virtuosic, seemingly endless phrases crafted to perfection. Moments of intense sweetness and introspection were offset by ones of frantic tension, which Hoebig moved through with wonderful fluidity and great feeling.

In the meatiest work of the evening, pianist David Moroz joined Hoebig for WSO composer-in-residence Vincent Ho's substantial *Sonata for Violin and Piano*. This work, specially written for the husband-and-wife team, was a special commission by Harvard University's Fromm Music Foundation.

Opening quietly, it soon became an agitated dialogue with both players busily cavorting on fingerboard and keyboard. Full of texture and stylish string swoops, it combined driving rhythmic interest with harmonic depth.

The grave movement is a lyrically phrased song with opportunities for each instrument to respond lovingly to one another. The piano's little outbursts kept us on the edges of our seats. Ho couldn't have asked for a better duo to debut this work.

Also notable were fine performances by both the University of Manitoba Singers and Women's Choir, under the direction of Elroy Friesen. Soloists Ashley Klassen and Cassandra Chugh were heart-stopping in Abbie Betinis' arresting *From Behind the Caravan: Songs of Hâfez*, inspired by 14th-century Persian poetry.

The U of M Singers lent just the right touch of serenity and peace to Schafer's *Three Hymns (from the Fall of Light)*.

This was a concert that will continue to resonate for some time.

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Concert Review

Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra New Music Festival

Garden of Eden

Westminster United Church

Feb. 1 Attendance: 734

4 out of five

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