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Vous êtes arrivées chez Lillas Pastia

Evelyn Glennie conjures the spirits

Posted on March 3, 2011 by [Definitely the Opera](#)

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New Creations 2011 opened last night at Roy Thomson Hall with **Toronto Symphony Orchestra** (c **Peter Oundjian**) performing a brief and amusing piece by **John Adams**, *A Short Ride on a Fast Machine*. The twisted take on the fanfares was a good appetizer before the two pièces de résistance that made up the evening: [The Shaman](#) that **Vincent Ho** composed for the percussion shaman superstar **Evelyn Glennie** and the full performance of John Adams's (no point in hesitating) masterpiece [Harmonielehre](#).

In recording, *Harmonielehre* is compelling aplenty, but hearing it live and played by the TSO is — let's reclaim this word from the teenage misuse — in the realm of *awesome*. It's a three-movement symphony, in which Adams makes the propulsion, repetition and discordant tempi of minimalism converse with the vocabulary of the later Romantic symphonies and orchestral pieces. Part one begins recognizably minimalist and gung-ho, and as it progresses the seeds of its dissolution develop from the margins and gradually take over, when you find yourself in what you can swear is Mahler or Sibelius. This completely different atmosphere and different textures then free themselves and as they overgrow they start changing shape into more strident, machine-like, atypically tonal, increasingly irregular until you're back in the familiar territory that Adams started with. But of course, by then, neither territory is safe and at one with itself. Our habit in identifying what's musically what is by then well disturbed.

This movement is followed by the more lento *The Anfortas Wound* (composed at the time when John Adams thought a lot about the place of grace and the unconscious in music making) and the final movement, *Meister Eckhardt and Quackie* which begins as a berceuse and ends in full blast noise explosion.

To observe such a complex structure come live before one's eyes, player by player and instrument by instrument, is extraordinary experience. (Get the higher up seats for the rest of the festival!) The TSO under its conductor performed with ferocity and mean precision. Bravi tutti, and no wonder John Adams grinned and looked happy for the entire oh, how many? four-five curtain calls?



In his piece created specifically for Evelyn Glennie, Vincent Ho wrote the orchestra first, then added the percussions as counterpoint (he explained this during the intermission chat). They collaborated throughout and the finished piece leaves considerable *ad hoc* composing room to the percussionist. Glennie moved quickly between the full gamut of percussion instruments and even played with the delayed waves of her own amplified voice (Can somebody provide more information about what that was? I am guessing it was artistic manipulation of the miked sound. And tell more about those myriad bells, while you're at it.) It was she who carried the orchestra and surfed its wave. In this case, the TSO was but a dance partner. The evening of Shamanism it was: the RTH was already packed with humans when all the spirits happily showed up for duty.

Here's the amazing Evelyn Glennie — who, did I forget to mention, happens to be deaf — talking about how we hear music with our bodies not with our ears, and why the most important thing in music is what's *not* legible in the score.

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1. 

[Eyesometric](#)

[March 3, 2011](#)

That’s a fabulous video and you are remarkably lucky to have experienced Glennie live. I recall a long time ago seeing a documentary film about her childhood on a Scottish farm, her music teacher who got her to hear through vibrations from the floor and walls as well as the instrument, how she would learn by clutching a rickety old tape recorder to her body and how she passed the audition for her music college without mentioning that she was deaf. Most inspiring was her trip to South America to learn about samba instruments first hand. Like I said – lucky you!

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2.

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And she plays barefoot because she is registering the vibrations of sound that way too.

To observe her running running around from one station to another, shoeless, getting all worked up over this solo sequence or that... Just amazing.

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3.

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Oh, and also: Scottish English: hot. R reminds of the German-Italian-Slavic kind of R.

“...and perhaps lies underneath a marrrrrimba”, “if therrr werrr no rrrresonatorrrs herrrre”, “incrrrrredible”. Incrrredible indeed.

[Reply](#)

o

[Lucy](#)[March 5, 2011](#)

When I studied in Oxford, I met a Glaswegian named Rowan, and spent many post-church coffee hours trying to get her to talk as much as possible. If possible using words with “r” in them.

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■

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A woman named Rowan?! Yes, please!



■

stray

[March 6, 2011](#)

“...she is a birch, a hazel,
a straight slender young rowan...”



■

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[Beautiful.](#)

4.



[Eyesometric](#)

[March 4, 2011](#)

Hmm. Nice Rs!

[Reply](#)



5.

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When I look at Evelyn Glennie, I get all hopeful and giddy: so a woman *can* be free after all.

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o

[Eyesometric](#)

[March 4, 2011](#)

That thought is too profound for me to give a trite answer.

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■ [Definitely the Opera](#)

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But seriously. When I try to remind myself of the women who are, in spite all the obstacles, living a life of developing their talents and potentials to the fullest, the names don't exactly flood in.

6. 

[Eyesometric](#)

[March 5, 2011](#)

Perhaps an interesting post or essay some time?

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Or, even better, a DVD of Glennie performing.

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■

[Eyesometric](#)

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She climbs mountains and does jewellery too.

<http://www.evelyn.co.uk>



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I know! And what am I going to report at the Pearly Gates? There are days when I feel like I will only be able to mutter, “Um... I spent a lot of time on the internet?” (and in that awful North American teen uptalk)

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[thả diều](#)

[March 5, 2011](#)

didn't quite make it to the end of the video yet but wow, i soo amazed and impressed. it's so true we listen without feeling just because we can hear. Sort of like we see without seeing. will come back to this after traviata tonight.

I think it was similar with Thomas Quasthoff, he was rejected from attending a musical institute in Germany because they said he couldn't play at least 2 instruments (the requirement).

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I like the parallel that she used: what's written in the score is only what we see of (and judge about) a person. What we don't see and must know how to get to is much more important.

[Reply](#)



[Lucy](#)

[March 5, 2011](#)

Amazing indeed. Thanks for the review, and the fabulous video... lots of food for thought. Great evocation of Harmonielehre, too – makes me want to hear it again!

Not only is Glennie truly inspiring, her remarks on lying under an instrument bring up a nostalgic glow for me. Having listened to a young Jorge Bolet from under a Steinway when he himself was a child, my father would park my sister and me under our piano when he played, and we would listen and touch and take delight (giggling was involved.) Feeling an orchestra vibrate your bones is surely one of the great pleasures of a concert hall.

...Am now going to spread this video among as many people as I can think of.

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11.

M

[March 6, 2011](#)

Thank you for introducing me to this amazing musician.

I wish I could just enjoy the video objectively; unfortunately, there's this deep sense of frustration as well: I guess the only real obstacles on our path to artistic fulfilment — or indeed any fulfilment — are the ones we create ourselves. All I ever do is derivative — hopefully one day I will allow myself to create something original and not find it wanting.

On a lighter and less note: a woman named Rowan ... who knew. This puts the Blackadder III joke "Angus is a girrrrl" in a different light.

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12.

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M, I think everybody who ever tries doing something will be ridden by doubts. Continuously. In fact, when you stop saying to yourself "This is not good enough", you're doomed. But we should respond to the doubts by doing more, and learning by doing, and not with a paralysis. I'm sure you've all seen this <http://vidaweb.org/the-count-2010>. Some of these numbers are I'm sure due to "I'm not good enough, therefore I won't even bother trying" philosophy.

So yes, I agree, many of our obstacles are self-created. But not all obstacles are. Systematic and historical exclusion of women from certain professions and top tiers of certain professions is not self-imposed by women. Physical disability is not self-created. Being born in a low income family or region of the world is not self-created. And so on. So we shouldn't create our own limitations when there are so many already awaiting us.

Lucy, Adams played his City Noir (2009) last night, and since I've already used the word

‘masterpiece’, I don’t know what to say. A master’s masterpiece? Such a complex work, and interestingly with not much minimalist vocabulary.

[Reply](#)



13.

[Lankin](#)

[March 6, 2011](#)

I am absolutely amazed — not only by the sheer ability, but by the way she is passionate, living and breathing what she does.

I love the bit where she detaches her experience as an artist from the audience’s; claiming that she isn’t to be held liable for anyone’s emotional baggage. Her way to feel is different from everyone’s else’s; and better yet, she knows it! For me it is fascinating how two people can experience/witness/look at/listen to the exact same thing and everyone gets something different out of it; especially concerning a performance or a piece of art.

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