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ORCHESTRA BOREALIS PRESENTS: Vaughan Williams' 'A London Symphony'

Edmonton musicians share classical program with Camrose

By Jessica Ryan

Spend a Sunday afternoon at the symphony with Orchestra Borealis Oct. 21 at the Jeanne and Peter Lougheed Performing Arts Centre.

Orchestra Borealis is an Edmonton orchestra composed of volunteer musicians who rehearse once a week and perform three to four concerts a year. The program they will be bringing to Camrose includes a recognizable Italian opera selection, a brief but beautiful Telemann viola concerto and the main event, Ralph Vaughan Williams' "A London Symphony."

Margaret Fisher, vice-president of the orchestra's board of directors and principal horn player, said concert-goers are sure to enjoy this seldom-performed symphony.

"There are a lot of tunes in there where the audience is going to go, 'Hey, hang on. That's Phantom of the Opera!'" Fisher said. "It's very, very listenable."

The symphony features a variety of styles, she said, with "loud, fanfare-type, fun stuff for brass" in the first movement, "beauty and blending" in the second, a faster scherzo in the third and a funeral march that gets cheerful again in the last movement.

Artistic director and conductor David Hoyt, formerly a conductor of the Edmonton Symphony for over 20 years, had never played or conducted this symphony before, but was eager to take on the challenge of something new.

"It's a good thing, when you're retired, to still be obligated to learn stuff," said Hoyt, who now conducts a mere 15 concerts a year, down from 150. "I really enjoyed getting to know it, and getting to know Vaughan Williams' work more generally."

The composer, who lived from 1872 to 1958, spent time recording folk songs from the English countryside that had never been written down, and this influence comes through in "A London Symphony."



"He was really of both worlds; he was of the classical world, and also was interested in folk music," Hoyt said. Folk tunes "are simple in a way, but on the other hand they're completely honest as a form of expression, from people who probably didn't read music at all but enjoyed music."

The orchestra members will have about 10 rehearsals under their belts by the time they arrive in Camrose.

"The most elementary part of it is to know your part, and know your notes and the timing, but it's the putting it together and getting the right flow and the mood of the music that's so important," said Fisher.

"When you're preparing a performance, you're also preparing, in a sense, your mind to know what's coming up ahead in the next 32 bars, or the next 64 bars," Hoyt added. "It's not just a matter of the little technical details we work out, which of course we do, but also the greater sense of it."

The resulting sense of accomplishment for these amateur musicians is arguably greater than for professionals used to performing two or three times a week.

"When they come off of a concert, these people, they're on a high," Hoyt laughed.

"We really have a very strong desire to share our music," Fisher added. "We really think that this is important so that people can hear classical music, so we appreciate the opportunity to come out (to Camrose)."

Both Hoyt and Fisher welcome potential audience members who may not think a classical music concert is for them.

"Even for someone who's relatively new to classical music, this is not going to be painful to sit through," Fisher said, laughing. "People can just sit back and relax, and just let the music take their minds where they want to go."

Hoyt thought back to his days with the Edmonton Symphony, when often someone's first question would be, "What do I have to wear?" As if there was some sort of dress code. Well, there isn't. Come as you are, listen to the music with an open heart, and you'll be fine." Visit the box office (780-608-2922) or camroselive.ca to get your tickets.

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