

Review: Symphony for brass quite a gas

BY RICHARD TODD, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN JUNE 12, 2012



Capital BrassWorks program for Tuesday evening's concert included the world premiere of Jan Jarvlepp's *Symphony for Brass*.
Photograph by: Lev Berenshteyn, The Ottawa Citizen

REVIEW: Capital BrassWorks

Parkdale United Church

Tuesday, June 12

OTTAWA — What do you think of brass instruments? We all know that strings are the finest of the fine, and woodwinds can be very beautiful as well. For sheer niftiness, nothing beats percussion (forgive the pun) but, let's face it, brass instruments well played can be pretty special too.

Now I know what you are thinking: Sure, brass instruments can make a big sound. Mahler and Strauss would have been mere nobodies without them, but they have their limitations. For example, there are symphonies for just strings, and even some for just winds. But have you ever heard of a symphony for brass? I hadn't, at least not until Capital BrassWorks announced its program for Tuesday evening's concert.

It included the world premiere of Jan Jarvlepp's *Symphony for Brass*. So there. One doesn't usually associate the idea of Canadian music with symphonies, though there are some around. This spring

there have been premieres of two, both by Ottawa composers, the earlier being Andrew Ager's monumental *Rubyat Symphony*.

The Jarvlepp is a fine piece, probably the best I've heard by this composer. It is in four movements, slow-fast-slow-fast, each wonderfully crafted. The slow movements are entitled *Solène* and *Night Music*. They are not exactly brooding, but serious and profound. There were times when the music seemed to be straining against the constraints of a brass ensemble. One wished for a full orchestra at these moments, but for the most part Jarvlepp worked comfortably within the brass idiom. It should be noted that the scoring included percussion, as does that of most of the music the BrassWorks plays.

The second movement is called *Brass March*, a fine concoction with quirky rhythms and lots of colour. But it was only in the last movement, *Street Music*, that Jarvlepp's signature sound of old-time rock'n'roll came to the fore.

Jarvlepp's mode of expression is a tad more concise than Mahler's or Bruckner's, for example, so the BrassWorks had to include some other pieces in its program. The most successful of them were an arrangement of Saint-Saëns's *Marche militaire française* and a suite from Bizet's *Carmen*.

The latter was especially notable for its colour. We are used to hearing this music in Bizet's wonderful original orchestrations, but the absence of strings and winds was not at all onerous Tuesday evening.

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