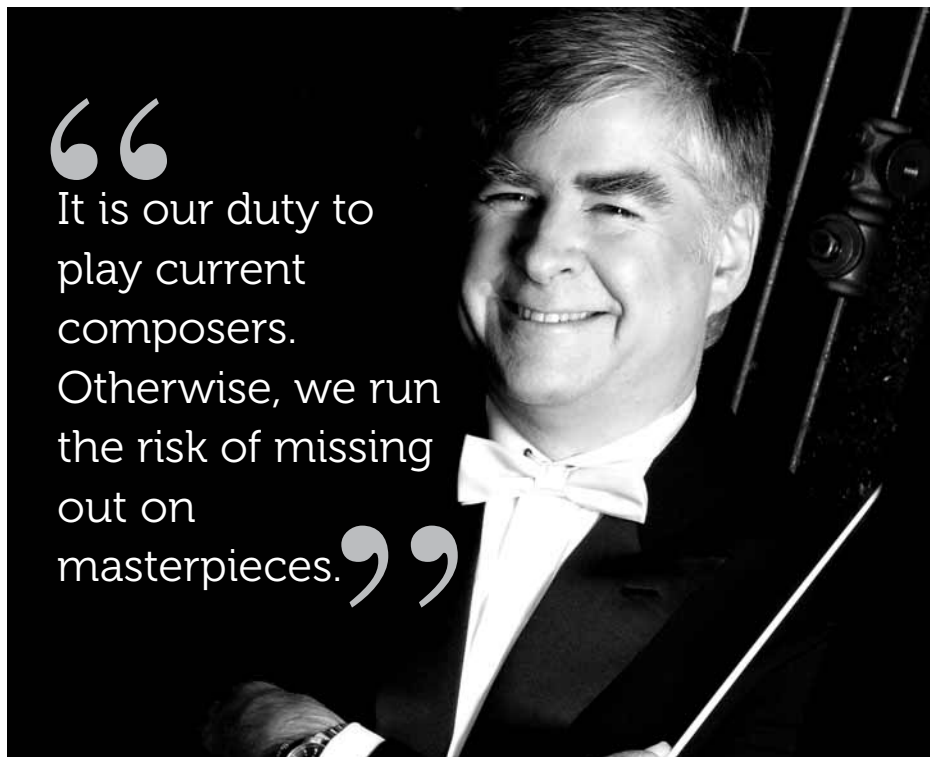


Choosing the Road Less Travelled

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARC DAVID, CONDUCTOR OF THE ORCHESTRE SYMPHONIQUE DE LONGUEUIL

“It is our duty to play current composers. Otherwise, we run the risk of missing out on masterpieces.”



by HASSAN LAGHCHA

Marc David, who celebrates his 20th anniversary with the Orchestre symphonique de Longueuil (OSDL) this year, discusses how the orchestra conductor's profession is changing, the future of classical music, and responsibilities toward the upcoming generation of musicians and his hopes for the future.

“More and more orchestra conductors are becoming public figures. Maestros work all over the globe, bringing a considerable change to our already internationalizing profession. Just take a look at the diversified nationalities of orchestra conductors in Canada, like everywhere else,” says Marc David, who has 500 concerts to his credit and is often sought out as a guest conductor by orchestras across Canada and internationally. The maestro, who also conducts the Newfoundland Symphony Orchestra, recalls how conductors once upon a time used to stay with the same orchestra for decades. “Now, maestros can’t help but aspire to conducting great American or European orchestras,” David says, although he prefers to focus on the long-term development of his orchestra.

► NO WORRIES

“I’m not worried about the future,” David says. “People seem to think that the future of classical and orchestral music is in danger, but not here in Longueuil.” Proof: “The OSDL is almost always sold out,” he points out. “And 80% of our members renew their membership each year.”

But the OSDL needs a new concert hall. It currently performs in a CEGEP theatre hall, hardly ideal acoustics. Marc David rejoices over the financial engagement confirmed by public officials at the provincial and municipal levels to provide Longueuil with a new hall. He also wishes for a core of full-time musicians. “Currently, the orchestra’s musicians also work for other orchestras or teach at universities or the Conservatoire,” he adds.

He dreams of having at least a core resident quatuor to establish permanent work schedules, and especially to reduce problems caused by schedule conflicts, given the musicians’ many commitments.

► HEARING THE NEXT GENERATION

“It is our duty to play current composers. Otherwise, we run the risk of missing out on masterpieces,” predicts the disciple of Charles

Bruck of the École Pierre Monteux, renowned for transmitting French repertoire. David believes that we have to travel unbeaten paths to establish a musical program that leaves room for the next generation and gives the public an appetite for new music. “Over the years, we have worked to get the OSDL’s audience used to new musical creations,” David points out. “New discoveries are equally interesting for the musicians.” He also points out that in choosing his soloists, he makes sure to leave room for younger performers alongside the more experienced musicians, giving the next generation the chance to perform with an orchestra.

Marc David further enthuses about the Portée pédagogique series targeted toward students; it was created in collaboration with the Commission scolaire Marie-Victorin and offered on request to other school boards. The series allows students to participate in the production of a large-scale music concert and perform on stage with a symphony orchestra.

► SIGNED: PROXIMITY

“Be as close as possible to the audience. Interact with the audience, but defy it at the same time, bring it to understand our artistic process.” Marc David thus describes the OSDL’s signature. He underlines the importance of staying with the same orchestra for a long time. “It means a program can be established over many years with, of course, at centre stage the basic repertoire that must be played—as much for the audience as for the musicians—to uphold the quality and acuity of musical play and to keep the audience interested” He cites Beethoven’s nine symphonies, Brahms’ four symphonies, Schumann’s four symphonies, Tchaikovsky’s and Mozart’s final symphonies; the great piano, violin and cello concertos, and the great overtures.

It is imperative that interpretation be “a constant effort to find the composer’s inspiration. Conducting a reproduction of notes frozen onto a sheet of paper doesn’t interest me,” says the multi-instrumentalist turned composer as a result of his passion for ensemble music. A profession that, according to him, requires leadership and communication skills and an ability to bring people together. One that allows interaction with other musicians, and to continually further his understanding and analysis of musical works, and especially to transmit his joy of discovering the secrets of high-caliber composition. **LSM**

TRANSLATION: CATHERINE HINE

www.osdl.ca

THE GRAND PIERRE-BÉIQUE ORGAN

A Historic Premier at the Maison Symphonique

by **CHRISTINE MAN-LING LEE**

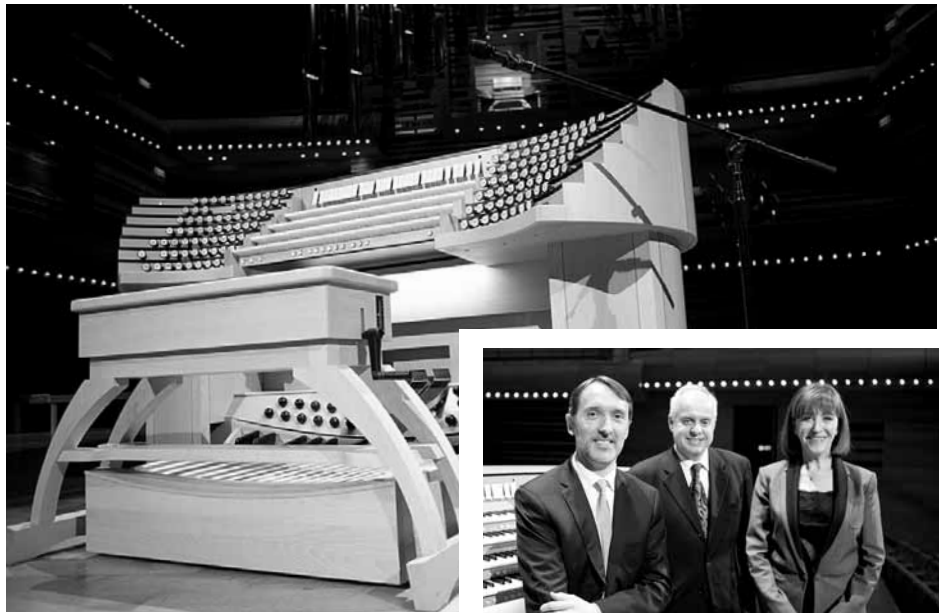
The Grand Orgue Pierre-Béique represents nearly five years (and for some, eight years) of combined efforts by the OSM; Olivier Latry, OSM's organist emeritus; architects Diamond Schmitt + AEdifica, and Casavant Frères. From this moment forward, the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal has a new family member at the Maison symphonique: the Opus 3,900. The instrument, built by the world-renowned Casavant Frères, has four keyboards, 109 registers, 83 stops, 116 ranks and 6,489 pipes. Its name pays tribute to the OSM's founder and first general manager, and acknowledges his remarkable contribution to the orchestra's mission of excellence.

The orchestra's loyal followers will have witnessed the gradual evolution of the organ's façade, which included the addition of three series of pipes, horizontal and perpendicular to the ground. The latter are reed pipes, in which air pressure causes the languet to vibrate to produce sound, much like the vibration necessary to play a clarinet or saxophone.

The façade, however, is just one part of the massive creature that is the Grand Orgue. Behind the hundreds of pipes, which are illuminated by blue light, is a four-level construction made up of all the other reed and flue pipes, as well a large part of the technology allowing for a second console on the stage.

"The bellows are housed in the basement, where three ventilators provide air for the instrument. The console and the pipes for the second keyboard, the Positif, are found on the first level. One level up, the Grand-Orgue and the Grand-Chœur are found, which are the first and fourth keyboards, respectively. On the last level is the récit, which is the third keyboard," explains Denis Blain, Casavant Frères' technical director.

The smallest pipes are 10-12mm maximum, and the largest are up to 32 feet high; their impressive height can be admired on the façade. The pipes are all made of the same metal alloy, with differing compositions of tin and lead (with the exception of the wood pipes). "The pipes with the most powerful sound are made with a higher concentration of tin, whereas the pipes with a softer sound, like that of the flute, are made with a higher concentration of lead. The principals are between the two, made up of equal parts tin and lead," explains Blain. The groundwork for the majestic instrument was formidable and the result of the combined effort of approximately 60 workers over the



LEFT TO RIGHT: Olivier Latry, organist emeritus at the OSM; Jacquelin Rochette, artistic director of Casavant Frères; and Madeleine Carreau, CEO of the OSM. **PHOTOS** Alain Lefort

course of two years. "Not only were the pipes all handmade," Blaine says, "but the metal was also cast in the workshop."

AN ACOUSTIC PUZZLE

The Maison symphonique is one of Montreal's top acoustic spaces for orchestra. The room's acoustic reflectors are paramount in attaining a strong acoustic balance. The panels, however, caused headaches for the crew with the addition of the new family member. "Depending on the point from which we hear the organ, the sound changes. For example, where the reflectors are lower than the pipe openings, the sound is different from one spot in the room to the next," says Blaine. "The best sound for the organ is therefore when the reflectors are on the ceiling." A trial, break-in and adaptation period is therefore essential for the positioning of the reflectors, the organ and the orchestra musicians as well as for conductor Kent Nagano.

A NEW ERA

The Grand Orgue Pierre-Béique is among the world's most noteworthy orchestral organs. Not only was it designed to complement the nuances and dynamics of an orchestra, but it can also blend with its sound and timbre. In fact, the sound of the organ was developed so that it can, as Olivier Latry explains, "model

itself after and be like the orchestra," particularly through its momentum, which characterizes the thralls and sounds of the orchestra. Furthermore, having a second console at orchestra level helps integrate the organ with the orchestra thanks to the cohesive sound the organist hears when among the other musicians. The second console was installed at orchestra level thanks to technology; electronic transmission via a network cable controls a second type of action inside the organ. The only drawback is that "we feel nothing beneath our fingers," explains Latry. He goes on to explain that, despite this drawback, he prefers the second console; a "cohesive sound" is more important: "We hear basically what the audience hears." Furthermore, Latry finds the contact with the other musicians extremely valuable: "We are truly there, amid the orchestra, next the conductor, with the musicians. There is sight, breath; it's all there." The console can even be moved anywhere on the stage.

As for the first console, it is attached to the organ (and has to be, from a mechanical point of view) and is situated a few metres above the orchestra. There, the organist has better contact with the sound, and manages to "feel everything that passes beneath his fingers," which makes for a more pleasant experience for the musician.

The arrival of the Grand Orgue marks an obstacle overcome, a new level, not only for

the OSM, Casavant Frères and all other collaborators, but also for Montreal's cultural landscape. "This will be the first orchestral organ installed in a symphony hall," explains Jean-Willy Kunz, the resident organist at the OSM. "For the first time in Montreal, we will be able to hear repertoires—many repertoires—for organ and orchestra." This isn't for lack of effort: "Conditions never allowed for it," explains the organist. "Organs were in churches, where layouts don't always allow for a large orchestra. Also, acoustics in churches aren't favourable to orchestral music."

"Here at the Maison symphonique, all the conditions come together. The orchestra sounds magnificent in the space, as does the organ," adds Kunz. It is therefore an ideal context in which "to bring new and unheard repertoires to the public."

TESTING AND THE OSM

Jean-Willy Kunz was nominated as organist in residence following public auditions held on March 17, 2013. In view of the inauguration and all the work necessary to complete the varied projects related to the Orgue Pierre-Béique, the OSM launched a call for applications almost two years before the May 28, 2014, inaugural concert. The search for an organist culminated in final, open to the public, auditions held on March 17, 2013. The selection committee was made up of Maestro Kent Nagano, Olivier Latry, Pierre Grandmaison, John Grew, Jacquelin Rochette, Noël Spinelli and Patrick Wedd.

CONSTRUCTION AND HARMONIZATION

During the construction and harmonization period, Olivier Latry, tenured organist of the Great Organ of Notre-Dame de Paris, brought undeniable expertise and a wealth of knowledge about organs that allowed for the creation of the Grand Orgue Pierre-Béique, "a true musical instrument."

"I've been very impressed," notes Latry, "by the capacity of Casavant's organ builders to develop and modify the organ's sound settings on the basis of aimed-at results," that is to say, an orchestral organ capable of offering a 'wide range of tones,' as well as a vast 'orchestral palate' working with timbres and musicality. Latry, incidentally, stayed up all night at the Maison symphonique on a few occasions in preparation for the official acceptance of the organ, the last step in the process.

OFFICIAL ACCEPTANCE

January 16, 2014, marked a momentous occasion for the OSM and all participants in the project: the official acceptance of the Grand



THE SMALLEST PIPES are no larger than 10 to 12 mm. The smaller the pipes, the more shrill the sound.
PHOTOS Alain Lefort



Orgue Pierre-Béique, a contractual procedure confirming receipt of the instrument, where a rigorous inspection takes place once the installation is complete and the organ is ready for use.

"With this acceptance, harmonization work on the OSM's Grand Orgue Pierre-Béique is now concluded," declared Olivier Latry. "The organ will sound different under the fingers of each organist." He continued to explain that the unique characteristics of the organ, specifically "its adaptability, the great variety of its timbres and their wonderful musicality will be important assets in the performance of works with orchestra and organ repertoire."

Jacquelin Rochette received the acceptance on behalf of Casavant Frères with "joy and humility." "The Grand Orgue Pierre-Béique is quite certainly the most accomplished instrument that we've had the opportunity to build," he said.

At the acceptance event, Latry played Marcel Duprés' *Cortège et Litanie* on the organ, a piece intended for organ and orchestra. Although only the organ was played, tubular bells and glockenspiel were also heard at the beginning and end of the piece. Jean-Willy Kunz explained the mystery. "There is a set of bells inside the organ, tubular bells. The notes of two octaves, from G to G in the centre of the keyboard, are linked to the tubular bells through a mechanical device." This is the sound heard at the beginning of the piece. The second bells heard were the glockenspiel. "These are small bells fixed onto metal circles that turn with the help of another mechanical device."

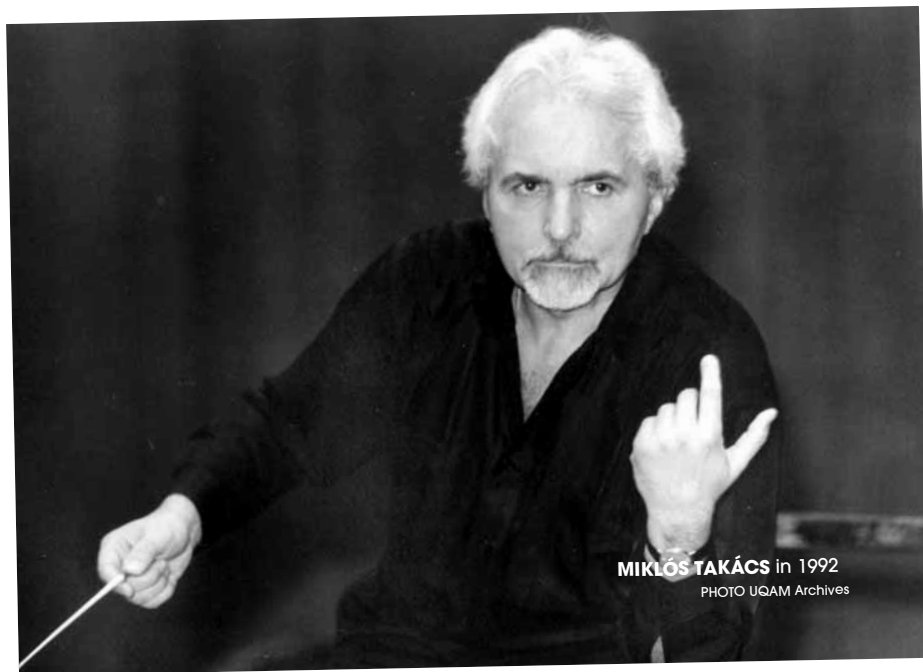
The instrument's majestic sound and its secrets will soon be revealed, but for the moment, a break-in period with the orchestra musicians, Jean-Willy Kunz and Kent Nagano, will be necessary prior to the Grand Orgue's official inauguration.

THE GRAND ORGUE PIERRE-BÉIQUE'S FUTURE

Events designed to highlight the organ are planned for the OSM's 2014-2015 season, such as the ORGAN series, which includes the premier of Jacques Hétu's *Organ Concerto*, a recital featuring Olivier Latry and a projection of *The Phantom of the Opera* accompanied by a musical improvisation on the Grand Orgue. The official inauguration will take place on May 28, 2014. Olivier Latry will play works by Bach, Saariaho, Liszt, Samy Moussa and Saint-Saëns. The inauguration week's program will include concerts on May 27 and June 1, as well as an open house on May 31. An interesting fact about Saint-Saëns' Symphony no. 3, which will be played at the inauguration, is that it was created in London in May 1886. This presentation will therefore be a 128th anniversary of sorts for the piece. Also, Kent Nagano is currently working with the original partitions. The Grand Orgue's inauguration will without a doubt be an incredible musical experience, not to be missed! **LSM**

www.osm.ca

TRANSLATION: ELISABETH GILLIES



MIKLÓS TAKÁCS in 1992
PHOTO UQAM Archives

Miklós Takács

A Longstanding Relationship with Choral Singing

par **MARC-OLIVIER LARAMÉE**

There is an abundance of professional and amateur choirs in the city of Montreal. However, few of them have had a strong and long-standing reputation, especially choirs that have been led by the same person for over 35 years. They can be counted on one hand. The UQÀM choir, under the direction of Miklós Takács, is one of these exceptions.

Takács is recognized as a choral and orchestral Master. His passion for music began long before he was born: “My mother and father met in the Great Oratorio Choir in Budapest ... then again on a ship to the blue Danube between Budapest and Vienna,” he said. His training as a musician quickly led him to pick up the baton and run with it: “I was in college when my professor, who led the college’s choir, had a last-minute obligation at a party where the audience was waiting. He sent a message that I was to replace him. From then on, Takács directed choirs in churches—where he performed admirably. Even soloists from the Budapest Opera House came to sing under his direction.

His arrival in Montreal can be credited to the UQÀM choir and Sister Marcelle Corneille, the director of the music department at that

time. Sister Corneille was at the Budapest Conservatory to take music courses to learn the Kodály method of which Takács was a strong supporter. This method stresses the importance of learning music, particularly singing, at a very young age; practicing this method develops a relative pitch. Learning to decipher notes, their ability remains the same regardless of the tone; they use the absolute pitch of the notes, the mobile “do”. Incorporating more than music, the Kodály method is also an educational philosophy. Sister Marcelle offered Takács a temporary contract, which he accepted and has been at UQÀM ever since.

When he arrived Takács noticed a significant difference between the European choral singing culture and that of Quebec. The differences are much less pronounced today. “Here there is as much or more musical activity,” he said. “Nowadays, there are more choirs, but mostly classical.”

Takács knows how to handle awkward questions. “During my audition at the Budapest Conservatory, one of the jurors asked me who was my favorite composer. Thinking it was a trick question, I replied that I still could not decide between Bach, Palestrina, Schubert, Kodály and Stravinsky.” We now know his preference is for the lyricism of

Schubert and Kodály and his folklores. Bach is undoubtedly a good choice, not to mention Beethoven.

Though often dependent on tours, competitions and concerts, the choice of works performed is personal for Miklós Takács. The Hungarian-born leader wants to educate the public about the often less-known choral music. “We must offer it in such a way that they (the public) are passionate about it before even hearing it. We must dare to include in our programs rarely performed works as well as well-entrenched works,” he said. This year, the traditional Good Friday concert (an institution since 1985) is dedicated to Verdi’s *Requiem*, a work he led for the first time in Montreal with the UQÀM choir. “One of my soloists told me that all the record stores sold out of *Requiem* the day after the concert.”

Classical choral music is often associated with sanctity. While being a believer himself, Takács presents the pieces in their context and invites the chorus to perform “as if they believe” as

he puts it. His intention is in no way to impose his beliefs, but rather to come as close as possible to the meaning intended for the piece by the composer. “The human mind seeks a conviction somewhere, but the important thing is that there is a conviction behind your thinking” he said.

Takács’ methods differ greatly from that of many other choirs – his choristers are placed almost randomly. That is why we might find a soprano, alto, tenor, and bass grouped together. This technique allows for choristers to listen to every voice. It is also necessary to know his or her own voice as well so as not to lose the thread. The choir is always accompanied by an orchestra or piano at concerts. From the beginning, Takács has set aside the interpretation of a cappella pieces. This choice allows him to work with the choir. This does not, however, stop him from enjoying parties with solo choruses performing great works. Learning music is essential for young people, says Takács. “Every school should have its own choir. Teachers do not want to undertake this hard work,” he said. He adds, laughing and quoting Kodály: “Learning music should begin nine months before the birth of the child.”

LSM

Miklós Takács will lead the UQÀM choir, the Jean-François Perreault school and the orchestra of the Philharmonic Society—400 singers and musicians—on April 18 at 8:00 pm, at St. John the Baptist Church for the traditional Good Friday concert. On the program: Verdi’s *Requiem*.

www.opmem.org

TRANSLATION: GILLIAN CORBIN

An Orchestra of Science

by CHARLES-DAVID TREMBLAY

Celebrating its 25th anniversary, the I Medici di McGill Orchestra is composed mostly of amateur musicians from McGill University's and the Université de Montréal's medical faculties' staff and students. On February 28th, more than 55 musicians under the baton of Iwan Edwards performed Antonín Dvořák's *Concerto No. 2 for Cello* and *Symphony No. 9* during a benefit concert organized by the Quebec Music Educators' Association and Viva!Sistema, an organization dedicated to children's music education.

The concert was based on interdisciplinary approaches and had several remarkable moments. One of these was strong interaction between the orchestra and Stéphane Tétéault in Dvořák's concerto—a convincing success with the help of precise conducting and contrasting dynamics. The orchestra's warm sound and dialogues among various sections allowed us to fully appreciate the ensemble's musical qualities. Health specialists and other

university fields determined that science and music can go together with the help of great and rich textures.

Ante Padjen, founder, director, and I Medici di McGill Orchestra's principal violinist since 1989, is Associate Pro-



fessor of McGill University's Faculty of Pharmacy. Trained in music and physics in Zagreb, Edinburgh and Washington, Padjen defines music and science as "a way to be a complete human being. Without music and science, it would not be possible to bring these two areas of interest together." When asked about the importance of music education to open potentially new scientific horizons for children, Dr. Padjen stated that "children may find an expression through music, and all children can express themselves with music." With regard to possible effects of music on cognitive development, he puts forward a clue. "Music has the opportunity to play with materials and develop skills that only instrumental experience can give." It seems that science and music are mutually nourishing.

Commenting on the work as a conductor and pedagogue, Iwan Edwards highlights the importance of science and music with children. As a teacher of Viva!Sistema's program, he makes sure to impart to

the children of St. Gabriel School a passion for music that not only allows them to be musicians but also makes them more open-minded to the world, but also bridges the gap in different areas of their life. "A conductor is always a pedagogue," Edwards said. Because music education is dear to Edwards's heart, he continues to praise children's work. "They work hard and are models for both musicians and their peers."

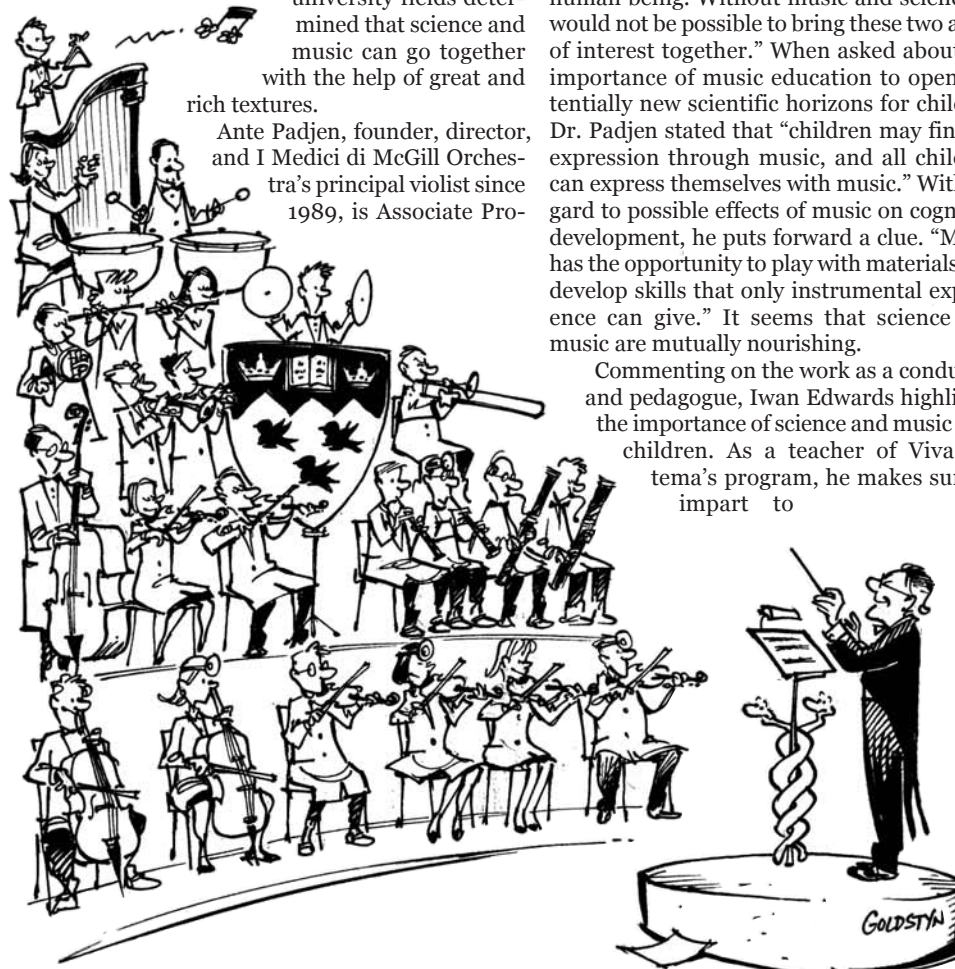
The gap between music and science is more present for many musicians interviewed during the evening. Jenny Zhu, the orchestra's second violinist, began her studies in classical performance when she was nine. She said the orchestra "gathers people of all ages and backgrounds; all musicians are united by a passion for music." As far as connections among orchestra members, this McGill University economics student told us that "everyone gets along and finds meaningful additions to their working life." She also highlighted Iwan Edwards's excellent work—conductor for the past 14 years. "He gathers people and has them work toward a common goal." Although economics seem far-removed from music, the connection between these two fields was obvious enough for this young woman that she decided to bring them together.

Isadore D.-Friedman, violinist since the age of seven and currently a violist, stressed that "being a member of such an orchestra allows you to be part of something larger than one's self." Now a masters' student, Isadore's passion for music naturally complements his interest in science and technology. He pointed out that members' passion for music is just as lively as their passion for their profession and field of study. Still, science and music are areas that need to be combined in many facets of daily life when students pursue a university career.

It seems that music and science are the firmest of foundations. Whether they are health professionals who have had a passion for music since childhood and find a balance with their working life, students who care about rewarding relationships with music and their area of study, or just amateur musicians who would like to enjoy a new life experience, the I Medici di McGill Orchestra goes beyond art and science borders. It's a bridge between science and music—and a meeting place for enthusiasts of both fields.

TRANSLATION: DWAIN RICHARDSON **LSM**

Iwan Edwards leads I Medici in the final event of the ensemble's 25th Season: Concert – Lecture, featuring Martin Karlíček in Dvořák's *Piano Concerto op. 33* and a speaker in the 26th Lecture on the Biology of Music. April 26 at 4:00 p.m. at Pollack Hall. www.imedici.mcgill.ca



by MARC CHÉNARD

THERE ARE A NUMBER of ways to measure the health of a jazz community. One of these is to see how many immigrant musicians it has. Montreal, for one, has always fared well in this regard. As far back as the Prohibition Era, the city had welcomed many an American, enhancing its bustling nightlife, and much later a share of draft dodgers during the Vietnam war. In more recent times it has attracted a steady flow of young talents due to its music programs, some electing to stay after graduation. But there are working professionals from elsewhere who have also settled in the city and made their own way. To shed a different light on our scene, both in its upsides and downsides, here are the views of three expats who have made Montreal their home.



RAFAEL ZALDIVAR

► **SINCE ARRIVING IN QUEBEC** in 2005, Cuban pianist Rafael Zaldivar has certainly come a long way. With several awards to his name (Jazz en Rafale contest, Révelations Radio Canada, Prix Archambault ...), and a contract with Effendi Records, this young man now teaches at the Université de Laval à Québec while pursuing doctoral studies in jazz interpretation at McGill University. His presence in Quebec is attributable to his partner in life, violinist Lianne Tremblay, whom he met while she was studying at Havana's Institute of Arts. Zaldivar's arrival was not an easy one, hampered by a difficult bureaucratic process (one can imagine), but he finally landed, first in his wife's hometown of Sherbrooke only to make the move to Montreal in 2008. By his own admission, there was some tough sledding in the beginning, given the social, political, linguistic and musical differences he had to adjust to. Joining the music scene was not exactly a cakewalk for that matter, but saxophonist Rémi Bolduc helped him out in the beginning. More importantly he

worked out a career plan focused on artistic development, acceptance of his peers and the marketing of his skills via recordings and promotional campaigns. Now having found his place, Zaldivar believes that jazz in Montreal is alive and well due to the number of mature, talented performers and a promising crop of newcomers. On the other hand, he is struck by the lack of media support towards the scene. In this regard, he notes an important difference in the attitudes between his adopted and native countries: "In Quebec, everything is based on economics and culture comes later, while in Cuba, culture is the main driving force. Since life is precarious there, culture leads to initiative with no thought of economic benefit."



FÉLIX STÜSSI

► **A NATIVE OF THE SWISS** mountains, more precisely from the canton of Glaris, pianist Félix Stüssi has had a long love affair with Montreal (in more ways than one). Travelling the high seas as a ship's mate, he first landed in Montreal in 1986 during the city's jazz festival (FIJM). After a first three-month stay, he would make several trips back and forth, eventually meeting his life partner. After five and half years back home, the couple would finally make Montreal their home in 1998. An historian by training, Stüssi is currently a columnist for several Swiss newspapers. As a musician, he learned his trade on the job, receiving advice along the way from Irene Schweizer, a leading pianist and improviser on the national and European scenes. With four recordings to his credit, this one-time winner of the FIJM jazz competition (in 2007) will soon release a new album of his sextet with star trombonist Ray Anderson in tow. After 16 years in the city, the pianist has a keen overview of things. On the plus side, he is fascinated by the wealth of talented people and the musical variety which produces a unique creative atmosphere in Montreal. Moreover, he is struck by the number of musicians who can easily drift from one style to another, something not seen in Europe, at least until recently. "If you played bebop over there, you

wouldn't be accepted in free jazz and vice versa." On the downside, he laments the lack of cohesiveness within the jazz family and the paucity of outlets for the music.



DAMIAN NISENSEN

► **NOT ONLY IS HE** a saxophonist and band leader, but Damian Nisenson also manages a production company (Malasartes) and issues recordings under that label. Last fall, he was elected co-president of the Regroupement Jazz du Québec (RJQc), an organization whose main purpose it is to give a voice to the community before the powers that be and the audience at large. A Porteño (a resident of Buenos Aires), Nisenson arrived here in 2004, embarking on his second experience away from home. In the '80s, he resided in Switzerland where he studied history while playing music on a regular basis with theatre companies, mainly in the French-speaking areas. After the fall of the dictatorship, he returned home, staying there until his departure. By 2001, he was becoming disenchanted with the social and political situation, so much so he thought of returning to Switzerland, but gave up due to administrative barriers. Chance would have it that he met a Québécois in Buenos Aires who boasted of the wonders of Montreal and its vibrant cultural scene. Damian Nisenson was hooked: Packing up his belongings, he made the long trek north with his wife and four of their five children. Now well-established in our midst, Nisenson sees the musical scene quite positively, but with some circumspection as well. On one hand, he was quite taken by the welcome given to newcomers like him and the sheer diversity of artistic expressions. On the other hand, he is of the same opinion regarding the lack of venues for the music, and notes an imbalance between public sector support for the arts and a limited number of viable outlets. What's more, he finds it very odd that the teaching of music in schools tends to cast young musicians in a mould, especially in a field that requires creativity.

LSM



BIG BANDS ON STAGE

LAST SEPTEMBER, this column presented a brand new Montreal jazz institution: the Orchestre national de jazz – Montréal. Eight months and four concerts later, this 16-piece outfit winds up its season with two shows, the first coinciding with the release of this issue (April 3), the last one taking place on May 1. True to its tradition of featuring a particular musician, orchestra member or otherwise, the ONJ will welcome saxophonist Jean-Pierre Zanella and pianist **MARIANNE TRUDEL** [↑]

respectively, the latter inviting the remarkable trumpeter Ingrid Jensen from New York and singer Ann Schafer from Victoria, B.C.

A graduate of the Eastman School of Music, Zanella fittingly offers compositions by former alumnae, most notably François Théberge (now teaching in Paris) and Zanella. Trudel, in contrast, will feature works by female composers such as Carla Bley, Satoko Fujii, Christine Jensen, and one of her own, a multi-part suite entitled *Dans la forêt de ma mémoire*. This musical offering will, in her own words, have a more open structure than usual big band charts, giving the players a greater degree of freedom in its interpretation.

While the ONJ's season is drawing to a close, it's already looking ahead. Before activities resume next September, the orchestra will play at the FIJM this year, most likely with a star soloist sitting in. Nothing is set at this time, but we will keep you posted on further developments in the next issue, devoted to summer festivals.

► **BETWEEN THESE TWO CONCERTS**, another large ensemble will take to the stage: the Vanier College Big Band. Since 1999, this Ville Saint-Laurent school has organized an annual benefit concert for its scholarship fund. With Oliver Jones as master of ceremonies, this event is dedicated each year to a personality on the jazz scene, active or not, who has

contributed to its development. This year's concert, its sixteenth, will pay tribute to reedman Sayyid Abdul al Khabbyr. Originally from Philadelphia, he settled in Montreal in the 1960s, and operated at one time the tiny Café Mojo on Park Avenue. In the 1980s, he left town for the Big Apple, landing a job with Dizzy Gillespie. Now inactive due to his advanced age (he was born in 1935), he nevertheless remains present in our minds thanks to his two sons: Muhammad, a trombonist and pianist, and Nasyr, a drummer, both Vanier graduates and slated to participate in the concert. Monday April 14, Vanier College, 7500 boul. Sainte-Croix, 7:30 PM. Tickets: 514-744-7500

► **ALSO TAKING PLACE** in April is a pocket-sized festival organized by Damian Nisenson's production company, Malasartes musiques. Spread over four nights (May 9 and 10 at Casa del Popolo, 15 and 16 across the street at the Sala Rossa), it will feature artists on the label, including vocalist Geraldine Eguiluz, launching her recording *Rubedo Ro*, for voice and string quartet, and Nisenson's quartet noZen with the local hot ticket Socalled.

Information on schedule and tickets:
www.malasartesmusique.com
www.casadelopolo.com (284-0122)

TRANSLATION: REBECCA ANNE CLARK

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25 Years with Nouvel Ensemble Moderne

by RÉJEAN BEAUCAGE

On the eve of its 25th anniversary, the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne (NEM) is no longer the newcomer that it was in 1989, but its programs are still full of new discoveries.

We weren't even surfing the Internet in 1989, that's how much time has passed! Lorraine Vaillancourt had been directing the Atelier de musique contemporaine at the University of Montreal since 1974 and was fresh from the experience of les Événements du Neuf (1978-1989) when she threw herself into the adventure of artistic and musical direction of the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne with a group of young musicians who, like herself, were avid to promote the best of what contemporary composers everywhere had to offer. When I asked her what memory surfaced first when thinking back over the last 25 years, her answer was immediate: "The first photo ... When we found ourselves on the Concordia Bridge for our first official photo. The excitement that was in the air at that moment. Or during our first rehearsal, at the beginning of January 1989, for the *Chamber Concerto (Kammerkonzert)* of Ligeti. It was thrilling, because I was surrounded by people who had a real desire to go somewhere with this project. I had the feeling of living something utopian, because the time that we wanted to take for the rehearsals, of course that has financial consequences ... so we set our sights on the first concert without thinking too much about what would happen after."

The NEM had a great start with its first concert on May 3, 1989, at Salle Claude-Champagne before an audience of 500. Lorraine Vaillancourt remembers: "We had started by over-reaching a bit, without financial support. I imagined that it would probably continue, but I had only thought up two programs ... Someone knowledgeable about fundraising convinced us that we shouldn't do two concerts, just one, and so we put everything into that one concert! Except George Benjamin's piece *At First Light*, but we played it as an encore ... and it's twenty minutes long!" The other works on the program were by Ada Gentile, Mauricio Kagel, György Ligeti, Steve Reich and Kaija Saariaho. I was never too uncomfortable about the absence of Canadian music," she explains, "because first of all, I had already done a lot of it, and also because I wanted to form an ensemble of performers,



and that changes the deal a bit. In this case, the Canadian product is the NEM itself. That being said, we did subsequently commission and create a lot."

400 concerts later

In 1989, the first concert of a contemporary music ensemble was covered in almost all the daily newspapers in Montreal, in both French and English. Today, how would it be? "In the media, information about new music hasn't gained much space in the past 25 years," observes Lorraine Vaillancourt. "On the contrary ... It doesn't just concern music ... It's a vicious circle: it has to interest a lot of people for us to talk about it ... and if it doesn't interest a lot of people, we don't talk about it."

Nevertheless, there is always a new generation, as evidenced by programs such as Les Rencontres de musique nouvelle at Domaine Forget (where the NEM holds its summer residency) and the Forum des jeunes compositeurs (organized regularly by the ensemble since 1991.) "In effect, we organize these concerts with young performers, and yes, they exist, and they want to hear this music. Not everything is negative. Some critics obstinately refuse to leave their comfort zone and say that no one is interested in this music, but that is of course false. We are often presented as *specialists*, with all the pejorative sense that the term can carry, which implies that one must be a specialist in order to come hear us ... That whole line of argument is completely contrary to our purpose. But we resist!"

And after 25 years with the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne and concerts in about fifteen countries, Lorraine Vaillancourt, are you where you would like to be? "Every time we play, I have that feeling. The NEM is really an ex-

traordinary ensemble! It definitely is still relevant and things will continue to develop, with a tour of the island that we will do in the spring, but also with concerts outside of Montreal."

So, do we raise a glass to 25 more years? "I certainly do think about what will happen after me in the more or less short term," says the founder. "I want to continue to direct, that's for certain, but not necessarily to take on all the artistic direction. I am also a professor at the University of Montreal, where the NEM is in residence, but I will not be there for decades to come, so things must be prepared. We must pass the torch, of course, but I would also like the ensemble to keep its special spirit." To be continued!

LSM

GRAND CONCERT – 25th ANNIVERSARY

May 9, 7:30 PM, Maison symphonique
Nathalie Paulin (soprano), John Fanning (baritone), Guy Nadon (narrator)
Claude Vivier: Bouchara
Walter Boudreau: Solaris (creation)
Alban Berg: John Rea, Wozzeck, 21-musician version (6 excerpts)

Meeting the NEM

Discussion with composer Walter Boudreau about the creation of his piece *Solaris* for the NEM's Grand Concert. Chapelle historique du Bon-Pasteur, May 3, 2:00 p.m. Free admission. www.lenem.ca

IN 1990, Lorraine Vaillancourt participated in the foundation of the periodical *Circuit* (published by the Université de Montréal) in order "to show people the effervescence of what we do, while giving an account of our ongoing concerts and recordings."

The publication appeared last fall in an edition titled *Géométries durables – pour les 25 ans du Nouvel Ensemble Moderne* (Vol. 23, no. 3, 2013.) This edition is an excellent companion to the book *Un parcours contemporain – NEM 1989-2009* (Cathy Beauvallet, Nathalie Cloutier and Lorraine Vaillancourt), a collection of impressionist snapshots and quotes from members of the ensemble, published to celebrate its 20th anniversary.

