

Young composer brings fresh ideas to Victoria Symphony

DAVID GORDON DUKE, SPECIAL TO THE SUN 08.19.2015 |



Jared Miller, still in his mid-twenties, was appointed this year as the Victoria Symphony's composer-in-residence. ERIC SNOZA

It's been a particularly good year for Jared Miller.

The musician, still in his mid-twenties, has been named one of CBC's "30 hot classical musicians under 30," won a SOCAN (Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada) award, and was appointed composer-in-residence with the Victoria Symphony.

Born in California, Miller grew up in North Burnaby. He studied piano and composition at the UBC School of Music, then relocated to New York for graduate studies. He is now completing his Doctor of Musical Arts in composition at the Juilliard School, studying with John Corigliano.

The composer-in-residence initiatives funded by the Canada Council have kick-started a minor national renaissance in orchestral music. But it's still highly unusual for orchestras to be associated with composers in the early stages of their careers. Pragmatically, this seems an obvious strategy for classical music organizations who slather at the thought of fresh, younger audiences. I asked Miller how being smack in the middle of this desirable demographic affected his Victoria gig.

"I'm no marketing expert," replied Miller. "But having taught many young students myself, I'm always amazed at the multitude of musical styles and genres they gravitate toward. It's so wonderfully unpredictable. The same student to whom I'm teaching a Taylor Swift tune will be equally enthused by Mozart or even some Messiaen or Salonen."

Miller has clear ideas about how orchestras can adapt to changing tastes.

"Younger listeners are becoming more open to a variety of musical genres, and music that blurs the lines between different genres. At the Victoria Symphony our New Music festival for April 2016 will highlight several concerts of music that employs quotations from other styles, genres, and pieces. It's been a ton of fun to put together."

Many insist that the doom and gloom about the survival of classical music is more about presentation than product. Miller agrees: "I would love to see new music promoted in more casual contexts, in addition to occupying more significant positions on main stage concert programs. Many listeners might be more relaxed and open to new music if they could enjoy it with a nice glass of wine and a bite to eat. If only more orchestras could take creative risks."

Promoting music and building new audiences is not, however, the primary job of a composer-in-residence. What Miller compositions are on the docket for Victoria?

"I hope to write, depending on the length of my term, between four and six new pieces which will be relatively different from one another. I've already

written a string orchestra piece called Echoes of Autumn for this November, and I'm working on a 'show-opener' for our May 2016 season finale. Beyond that, I know so many fabulous pianists for whom I would love to write a work for piano and orchestra."

Finally, how do the U.S. and Canadian new music scenes differ?

"New music is almost entirely government funded in Canada, whereas it's almost entirely privately funded in the USA. Funding is more evenly distributed throughout Canada, whereas in the USA it really depends on the interest of donors and audiences in any given region."

Although Miller's institutional home base is Victoria these days, his hometown fans can sample some recent compositions this October, starting with a work that celebrates the centenary of Miller's alma mater, UBC, in an October 8 concert of the UBC Symphony, conducted by Jonathan Girard. On October 18, Standing Wave introduces Guilty Pleasures at Pyatt Hall; two days later, the flute/piano duo Tiresias premieres Lenny at the Fox Cabaret.