

Tafelmusik

Sizzling Strings

An interview with concerto soloist Aislinn Nosky

What drew you to this particular concerto?

I love performing Mendelssohn's works and I think it is a shame that a relatively small amount of his total output reaches audiences on a regular basis. He is unusual as a composer — from almost the moment he put pen (quill) to paper, he was writing well-crafted and interesting music. As I have worked on the D-Minor Concerto I have gained more and more respect for the skill he had as a composer at the tender age of 13. This music may have a fresh innocence but it is far from childish and I feel that it deserves to be heard.

How did you track down the music for this rarely performed concerto?

Finding the actual score took quite a bit of sleuthing. Charlotte [Tafelmusik librarian Charlotte Nediger] and I set about reading up on the concerto in assorted books on Mendelssohn. We found that the concerto exists in two versions, an incomplete first version, and a reworked and fleshed out second version. We discovered that the authoritative score of the second version is long since out of print, and the only copy we could find in North America is in the Music Library at the University of California in Berkeley. Since we didn't have any plans to visit California any time soon we ended up calling in a favour from Kate van Orden, former second bassonist with Tafelmusik and a musicology professor at Berkeley. She asked one of her doctoral students to scan the score for us. When it arrived there were about 20 pages of important notes having to do with corrections Mendelssohn made to the piece and they were all in German. My German has not yet progressed beyond excusing myself and ordering a beer! So, my next step was to enlist the help of the multi-talented Tafelmusik chorister and musicologist Kate Helsen to do me the great favour of translating all of the notes into English before I could finally start learning the piece. You can see this was a real Tafel team effort!

What do you do to prepare yourself for a week of performances like these?

Preparation for an intense week of performing, as in *Sizzling Strings*, starts a long time before the week of the shows. I started working on the concerto about a year ago. I put it on my "musical back burner," meaning I would practise it a little bit every day after finishing work on all of the music that was of more immediate concern at the time. As we got closer to the week of performances, I considerably increased the time spent on the concerto (you could say that in August the concerto was moved to the "front burner"). In the home stretch of the last few weeks I have tried to make sure I follow my usual exercise regimen of weightlifting, jogging and yoga as well as making sure I get enough rest to be in the best physical shape possible. Performing is physically demanding and being in shape helps me have the stamina I need to deliver a good show every night. During this week of performances I get to do something special, and that is to spend time with my parents who have made the trip from Nanaimo to see Tafelmusik in its home venue. I have been telling them ever since I joined the orchestra that our audience is the best audience in the world, and I am excited they will finally get to experience a concert at TSP for themselves!