

**Concert Report:  
Road Trip: The Toledo Symphony with Alain Trudel (March 5)**

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by Daniel Hathaway



As part of our continuing series of road trips to orchestra concerts within two hours' driving time of Cleveland, we hopped over to Toledo on Friday evening, March 5, to hear Canadian guest conductor Alain Trudel in the first of two concerts with the 70-some piece Toledo Symphony Orchestra and the local saxophone quartet known as Sax 4th Avenue. The program, titled "Scheherazade and Sax Appeal" (no doubt cooked up by the marketing department), included Prokofiev's 'Symphony No. 1 (Classical)', Phillip Glass' 'Concerto for Saxophone Quartet' and Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Scheherazade'.

Although the many activities of the Toledo Symphony take the orchestra to several venues, its home base is The Peristyle, a 1,700 seat indoor Graeco-Roman amphitheater located in the left wing of the Toledo Art Museum, which is itself an elegant, low-profiled, white marble Greek revival building about a mile from downtown. Not sign-posted, the Peristyle is a bit reticent about revealing its location -- we figured it out by following other concertgoers. (As you approach the steps, you surprisingly encounter an Art Nouveau Paris Metro station entrance which will take you nowhere).

Alain Trudel, who began his career as a professional trombonist, is principal conductor of the National Broadcast Orchestra, principal guest conductor of the Victoria Symphony and conductor of the Laval Symphony. His appearance with the TSO marked his US debut.

Tonight's concert began with the Prokofiev 'Classical' Symphony, an essay in creating a modern piece in the style of Haydn, and, uncharacteristically for Prokofiev, composed away from the piano. With four movements lasting a total of sixteen minutes, it's definitely a miniature even by Haydn's standards. Trudel, conducting with expansive rather than surgically precise gestures, set leisurely tempos, some of which became even slower in the course of a movement, an approach which sapped the piece of some of its wit and sparkle.

The Peristyle seems acoustically vast because of its width, and we had already wondered as we heard the orchestra warming up what the acoustics would be like in performance. The stage (backed by classical columns like the rest of the hall) is essentially a box with panels forming an acoustical shell at the top. Throughout the Prokofiev as well as the rest of the evening, we thought the orchestra sounded a bit distant, and as the concert went on, more and more concentration was required from the listener to focus in on what was happening.

Phillip Glass wrote his concerto for the Sigurd Rascher Quartet in the mid 1990's. The unattributed program notes comforted any potential listeners who were averse to the minimalist style Glass adopted in the mid to late 1960's with the promise that this would be a work of relaxed lyricism. Promise kept. Although repetitive minimalist elements were always present, this is a quite beautiful piece throughout all of its four contrasting movements. The third was, in fact, hauntingly lovely with expressive tenor sax, then clarinet solos over repeated chords and a magical moment when a baritone sax solo was doubled by celesta. Alain Trudel held everything together nicely; his precise gestures and mastery of shifting meters kept everything neat and tidy in the fast movements. Sax 4th Avenue (Stanley George on soprano, Shannon Ford on alto, Kevin Heidbreder on tenor and Jason Yost on baritone), most of whom hold down day jobs as band directors and music teachers, were phenomenal. They played with beautiful, nuanced tone and fine intonation. On

their second callback to the stage, they offered an encore: King Crimson's 'Frame by Frame'.

After intermission, we heard Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Scheherazade', a work -- according to the program notes -- that was soundly denounced by the Boston press in 1897 as "confused" and "cacophonous". While we don't agree with that, we have always thought that shaving off a third of its 40-some minutes would be A Good Thing. But like the Boston audiences -- to continue that story -- the Toledo crowd enormously enjoyed the piece, clapping between its four movements and giving Rimsky the second standing ovation of the evening (Mr. Glass won the first). Mr. Trudel led a clean and well paced -- if largely uneventful reading of the fairy tales. Concertmaster Kirk Toth was the eloquent soloist and incidental solos were sensitively played by a number of the TSO musicians.

The Toledo Symphony is obviously a talented ensemble and one well supported by its community, into which it extends many artistic tendrils. Stefan Sanderling is principal conductor, and besides the Peristyle series, the orchestra produces an annual Bruckner concert in the stunning ambiance

of Rosary Cathedral. Admirably, the TSO seems to have taken the decision to market itself as an ensemble rather than to attract an audience through high profile soloists. Probably a thousand patrons heard Friday's concert and the crowd ran the gamut of ages. Its more than 120 page program book efficiently covered eight concert sets from January through March and is strong on advertising content (helpful, too -- one full page ad suggested "call during intermission and your table will be waiting" and thus directed us to a fine restaurant). The possibility of purchasing a glass of wine during intermission would have been lovely, but cookies, coffee & juice can be enjoyed at modest prices.

We encourage Clevelanders to visit the TSO's website and plan a trip to hear this fine orchestra. At the same time, you can take in the excellent collection at the Art Museum (a Whistler exhibit is up through May 9) and visit the four-year old Glass Pavillion across the street to admire more than 5,000 artworks in glass from antiquity up to today. If you go on Friday, you can visit the Museum before a concert (otherwise, the collections close at 4 pm).