

Classics 'n' jazz combo

Mixing classical and jazz, community orchestra's spring concert features arrangements and trumpeting of Anita Eccleston

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ANITA ECCLESTON

Families are a big part of musical life and community orchestras, no less so with Thompson Valley Community Orchestra.

First there was conductor Norris Berg, joined by his wife, pianist Heather Berg, and their daughter, violinist Anita Berg Pratt, mainstays since Norris founded the orchestra back in the '90s.

In recent seasons, the Ecclestons have joined the 50-member, all-ages orchestra. Paulette plays percussion while her husband, Tom, plucks away at string bass, occasionally picking up a saxophone, his principal instrument.

The Eccleston dynamic adds another dimension next Saturday, May 7, as the TVCO presents its annual spring concert, Classics 'n' Jazz. Anita Eccleston, second trumpet with the Kamloops Symphony, is a natural fit for the theme, having embraced classical music and jazz.

"We wanted a jazz theme, and Anita seemed to fit for it," Norris said. "We prefer to feature local musicians whenever we can."

As guest artist, Anita contributes two of her own jazz-standard arrangements to the program - These Foolish Things and My Funny Valentine.

"They're originals I've created, basically for large and small orchestras," she explained. "It was really an awesome opportunity to work on arranging. I love arranging."

In her younger years, Anita had the tutelage of music teacher Syd Griffith at Westsyde secondary and studied with KSO music director Bruce Dunn. She obtained a degree in jazz performance at the University of Montreal and played in that city's vibrant jazz scene for a

couple of years before returning home.

Her musical career track reflects the eclecticism of her interests at this point, including two recordings in the works, a collection of jazz standards and another of originals to be called Clearly Indefinable.

"It's funny how that goes," she said. "It's sort of side-by-side jazz and originals."

Even the originals CD covers a lot of territory as the title suggests. The jazz recording includes tracks put down at McGill and fresh material featuring local musicians and Anita's singing.

"We're doing most of the recording in Kamloops (at Small World Studios) and a couple of sessions on the Coast â. I even had my brother (Tom Jr.) come in and play piano on a few tracks."

It truly is a small world.

"Kamloops has that kind of energy,"

With so many different projects on the go - arranging, teaching, recording and performing - how does she have time for special projects such as this?

"It's a Catch-22, but as an artist you have to keep doing it or there's no enjoyment of the labour."

Many young artists head for the bright lights of metropolis where greatest opportunity resides.

"I wouldn't dream of it. It's tough. It's a long road, but totally worth it. You've got to keep an eye on the goal. That's why this opportunity with the Thompson Valley Community Orchestra is so great. I love the crowds that come to these shows."

The concert opens in apropos style - considering the royal wedding - with George Frideric Handel's overture to Music for the Royal Fireworks. It's a gentle opening, a wind band suite originally composed to celebrate the end of the War of Austrian Succession.

In contrast, the closing number is Bugler's Holiday, featuring three trumpet solos by Anita, John Franks and Chelsea Lorence.

"It's a real sparkling little piece," Norris said.

Franks and Berg trade places during the show as the trumpeter picks up the baton and the conductor plays violin on Edward Elgar's Enigma Variations IX: Nimrod.

"He was a high school band director for a number of years. He's very versatile and he's a fine trumpet player."

Daughter Anita Berg Pratt will do the violin solo, accompanied by her mother Heather Berg, in Largo In A by Francesco Maria Veracini, an Italian Renaissance composer best known for his violin sonatas.

On the jazz side, the program also includes Chuck Mangione's The Children of Sanchez, Selections from Porgy and Bess by George Gershwin and a medley from the musical Chicago.

Bassoonist and tuba player Cal Muirhead, the eldest in the orchestra at age 82, has his chance with the conductor's baton with Satchmo! A Tribute to Louis Armstrong.