



Guest maestro takes on Queen Pouliot directs 220 performers

By Cam Fuller, The StarPhoenix November 15, 2012

Queen fans are liable to be rhapsodic on Saturday with the Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra's pops concert One Vision: The Music of Queen. More than 220 musicians will be on stage: A massed choir of 150 from Centennial Collegiate, St. Joseph High School and Tommy Douglas Collegiate, the symphony itself and members of "Jeans 'n Classics" - lead vocalist Michael Shotton, two backing vocalists and some of Canada's top session musicians who will perform 19 Queen hits such as Another One Bites the Dust, We Will Rock You, Bohemian Rhapsody and Fat Bottomed Girls.

Overseeing it all will be guest conductor Mathieu Pouliot, 24, the SSO's principal percussion player. He moved to Saskatoon from Montreal in 2011, postponing his master's degree in conducting at the University of Montreal.

StarPhoenix: What are your impressions of Saskatoon since you moved here last year?

Mathieu Pouliot: When we first moved here, we received a really warm welcome from our colleagues and from people all around the city. Using English was an issue at first, so we really appreciated the patience that most people showed us. It is nice to see a city growing so quickly and with big plans for the future. There is lots of room for musicians like me to take part in the development of the city as a cultural community. What is going on on 20th Street with the Symphony, Paved Arts, La Troupe du Jour, and other arts organizations really feels like something good is happening in this city. It's great to be part of it.

SP: As a percussionist, what are your top three compositions to perform?

MP: If I can include here percussion and timpani compositions, certainly the first of the top three would be Beethoven's Ninth Sym-phony. Beethoven changed the way to write for orchestra, but especially for the timpani and the percussion. It changed all the music that followed. Next would be Stravinsky's Le Sacre du Printemps (The Rite of Spring), with exciting parts for every instrument in the orchestra.

Finally, Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony. Shostakovich brought the word intensity to a whole new level.

SP: What do you like most about conducting?

MP: Being on the podium in front of the orchestra gives you the unique opportunity to feel each single vibration emitted by all the musicians in front of you. It gives you the chance to play with

this sound which at some point can be so heavy, and then so light. Each gesture you're making there changes the sound of the group. A simple motion of an eyebrow can lead to a reaction from a musician that will have a gunshot effect throughout the orchestra. There is nothing more scary than conducting, but there is nothing that's more fun, either.

SP: With 150 in the choir, a Queen band and the orchestra all involved, what is your role?

MP: For a pops concert like One Vision, the role of the conductor is a bit different than a classic one. Having a rhythm section playing with us, I don't have to concentrate on having the musicians playing together. Instead, I need to bring some cohesion among all the musicians in determining how to play some of the excerpts. My main role is to give them energy, pushing them so they play at a 110 per cent of what they thought possible.

SP: What is the best Queen song ever?

MP: For me, there is only one answer possible for this question: Bohemian Rhapsody. Given my age and the era that Queen's music was most popular, I didn't really pay too much attention until a short time ago, but I've got to say that I've been pleased with what I discovered in their compositions. I'll also give a shout out for Under Pressure, which is going to be even better with Jeans 'n Classics founder and arranger Peter Brennan's orchestration in this Saturday's concert!

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