



STÉPHANE TÉTREULT

BEING ROBERT SCHUMANN: **Cello Concerto**

Saturday, January 21, 2023 | 7:30 pm
Farquhar Auditorium, UVic

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MÉLANIE LÉONARD
Conductor

STÉPHANE TÉTREAUULT
Cello

Saturday, January 21
7:30 pm
Farquhar Auditorium
UVic

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BEING ROBERT
SCHUMANN:
Cello Concerto

Kelly-Marie Murphy (1964–)
Dragon, Unfolding

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)
Cello Concerto in A minor, Op. 129
Nicht zu schnell
Langsam
Sehr lebhaft

INTERMISSION

Rodney Sharman (1958–)
After Schumann

Louise Farrenc (1804–1875)
Symphony No. 3 in G minor, Op. 36
Adagio – Allegro
Andante cantabile
Scherzo. Vivace
Finale. Allegro

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Being Robert Schumann: Cello Concerto

Music is an abstract art, but what does it abstract from? The answers are many. Mongolian khoomei singing, for instance, mirrors the sound of the wind sweeping across the wide-open steppes, while that culture's instrumental music often builds on the thundering rhythm of racing hoof beats. Jazz stacks harmonies like New York City apartment blocks, and its wilder variants voice the anomie and dislocation of contemporary urban life. Other idioms draw inspiration from the human heartbeat, the tidal rhythms of the sea, or the enigmatic language of birdsong. And many composers, at least in the Western tradition, draw on some kind of internal narrative and then encode that into sonic form.

That encoding can be quite literally cryptic: think of how Dmitri Shostakovich worked the names of his lovers into his scores, or how Johann Sebastian Bach created a musical cipher around his own name in *The Art of Fugue*. More often, composers use key signatures and melodic motifs to telegraph their emotional state, none more poignantly than Robert Schumann. In discussing an earlier concert in the VS series *Being Robert Schumann*, featuring co-commissions of the Victoria Symphony and the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, VS music director Christian Kluxen spelled out how marital devotion, extramarital attraction, conflicted sexual feelings, and madness all coloured the great German composer's work.

But how do instrumentalists use this knowledge to animate and inspire their interpretive art?

That's a question Stéphane Tétreault has been wrestling with as he prepares to play Schumann's Cello Concerto in A minor in the current instalment of *Being Robert Schumann*.

"I definitely read a lot about the works I play in general, and obviously for Schumann," the 29-year-old Quebec native says. "And, yeah, the concerto's second movement, I think, can be viewed as a personification of his domestic life, but it can also be viewed as a dialogue between two people who love each other. Whether we want to think that it's an homage to Clara Schumann or not... I mean, that's debatable. But there definitely is something profoundly human in the concerto. You feel the mental health issues, you feel the depression, you feel different emotions that arise throughout the work. And as much as I think the historical notes are very important—and I do consider them all the time—in this piece in particular there is something to be said for just letting the emotions come to the forefront."

For the cellist, this means finding a personal connection to each piece he plays. "Given that we are performers, in a way we are actors," he argues. "So I feel that we need to remember things that have made us sad, or use personal experience. But we can also use vicarious experience, and we can use historical experiences as well. It's important to create a narrative, but there's also something emotional that just comes from interacting with the orchestra or with the conductor, creating music together. In general, if I feel open and aware of all of that, that emotion can come through."

How does Tétreault see the Cello Concerto as relating to the theme of “from darkness into light” that runs through the entire Victoria Symphony season?

“In Schumann’s music, we deal with a lot of fragmented emotions,” he says. “Obviously there are a lot of fragmented themes, especially in the first movement, that seem to go back and forth between light and dark. So it’s definitely appropriate to consider the concerto in that regard....There are a lot of themes that seemingly, on the surface, appear to be contradictory, and sometimes the harmonic colours, as well, are extremely contradictory. It seems a little bit bipolar, if I can use that expression, in the sense that it’s indicative of Schumann’s mental health—but there is also a lyrical aspect to the concerto that flows from start to finish.”

Other connections to Robert and Clara Schumann’s circle run throughout this program. Rodney Sharman’s *After Schumann* takes its course from Schumann’s song “Auf einer Burg,” and the Vancouver-based composer has said that he considers his score to be “a conversation between artists across time and space. I fragment the song, taking only its first two notes—so resonant and idiomatic when played on strings—creating a kind of fantasia on two notes through changes of colour, harmony, and scale degree,” Sharman explains. “Ascending scales adapted from Schumann’s piano part provide contrast, eventually layered and integrated into the music of *After Schumann*.”

Kelly-Marie Murphy’s *Dragon, Unfolding* was commissioned by Symphony Nova Scotia through the

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Anna Maria Mozart Award, in support of the creation of new orchestral works by Canadian women composers. The triennial award was established by Dr. Jane Gordon, who taught sociology and women's studies in Halifax for almost 40 years, who explained, "It's very hard to be exposed to music by women composers, because it's not often taught or recorded or performed. The music is out there—the Grove Dictionary of Women Composers is 500 pages long—but the music itself is very difficult to find." Kelly-Marie Murphy describes her work *Dragon, Unfolding* as being inspired by an ancient Japanese legend that anyone who folds 1,000 paper cranes will be granted a wish. Murphy's single, strong, and energetic movement follows the dragon being formed, rising, and taking flight, and in so doing, fulfilling Dr. Gordon's objective.

And Louise Farrenc's Symphony No. 3 in G minor is another apt addition, in part because Schumann was one of the French composer's few champions during her lifetime. There are also parallels with her near-contemporary Clara Schumann, but whereas Clara was forced by Robert's mental illness to set her own career aside in favour of nurturing her eight children (and her husband's legacy), Farrenc was almost literally dragged out of the shadows by her own husband, Aristide Farrenc, who saw in her a way to realize his own thwarted compositional ambitions. Nonetheless, some of Farrenc's most important music wasn't recorded until late in the 20th century, and her symphonies are still rarely played. But with three of them gaining recognition plus a substantial

body of chamber compositions under her belt, could it be time to consider a Being Louise Farrenc series in the not-too-distant future?

NOTES BY ALEX VARTY



Mélanie Léonard, conductor

Born in Montreal, Mélanie Léonard is the music director of Symphony New Brunswick. She was resident and associate conductor at the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra and Music Director at the Sudbury Symphony Orchestra.

As a guest conductor, she worked with many institutions such as the Montreal Jazz Festival, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre Métropolitain, National Arts Centre Orchestra, as well as the symphony orchestras in Edmonton, Regina, Victoria, Winnipeg and Nova Scotia.

On recordings, Ms. Léonard worked on soundtracks for *Aura* at the Montreal Notre-Dame Basilica, *Paradise City* in South Korea and *Cirque du Soleil's Land of Fantasy*.

In 2022/23, Ms. Léonard will be back at the Quebec Symphony Orchestra, Les Violons du Roy, Symphony Nova Scotia and Victoria Symphony and Orchestre Symphonique de Sherbrooke. She will be making her debut with the Newfoundland Symphony and Orchestre Symphonique de Laval.

Ms. Léonard was the first woman to complete a doctorate in orchestra conducting from the University of Montreal. In 2012, she received the Canada Council of the Arts Jean-Marie Beaudet award for orchestral conducting.



Stéphane Tétreault, cello

In addition to innumerable awards and honours, Stéphane Tétreault is the recipient of the prestigious 2019 Virginia Parker Prize from the Canada Council for the Arts. He is also the laureate of the 2022 Prix Opus for “Performer of the Year,” awarded by the Conseil québécois de la musique and accompanied by a Canada Council grant.

In 2016, Stéphane made his debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra under the direction of Maestro Nézet-Séguin and performed at the prestigious Gstaad Menuhin Festival in Switzerland. During the 2017/18 season, he took part in the Orchestre Métropolitain’s first European tour with Maestro Nézet-Séguin and made his debut with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Stéphane has performed with violinist and conductor Maxim Vengerov and pianists Alexandre Tharaud, Jan Lisiecki, Louis Lortie, Roger Vignoles, Marc-André Hamelin, Charles Richard-Hamelin and John Lenehan. He has participated in a number of masterclasses, notably with cellists Gautier Capuçon and Frans Helmerson.

His debut CD, recorded with the Quebec Symphony Orchestra and conductor Fabien Gabel, was chosen as “Editor’s Choice” in the March 2013 issue of *Gramophone* magazine. His second album with pianist Marie-Ève Scarfone, featuring works from Haydn, Schubert, and Brahms, was chosen as *Gramophone*’s “Critic’s Choice 2016” and recognized as one of the best albums of the year.

Stéphane was a student of the late cellist and conductor Yuli Turovsky for more than 10 years. He holds a master’s degree in music performance from the University of Montreal.

Stéphane plays the 1707 “Countess of Stainlein, Ex-Paganini” Stradivarius cello, generously loaned to him by Mrs. Sophie Desmarais.



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