

The Elephants are Hiding

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In Ontario, there's no better time to enjoy chamber music than the summer. Throughout the months of July and August, the hills are alive with the sound of string quartets, piano trios, and every small grouping of instruments conceivable. Ottawa's annual Chamber Music Festival is often touted as the world's largest event of its kind, and there are many more to choose from. (See the Festival Listings section in this magazine.)

To be sure, there's absolutely nothing wrong with plenty of chamber music. But what does the season offer to those with a taste for something grander? The symphony orchestra – the big musical institution that so conspicuously dominates the classical music scene during the rest of the year – seems to vanish during the summer months.

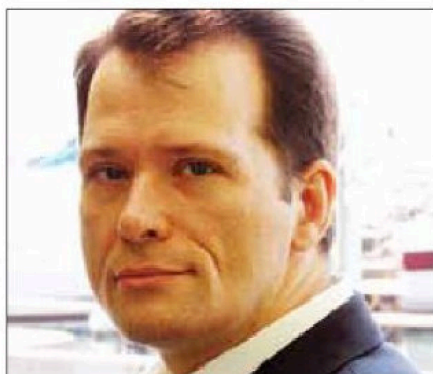
Most of Ontario's professional civic orchestras close up shop for the summer. (The exception is Ottawa's National Arts Centre Orchestra, which has concerts and also a public reading of works by young composers from July 22-25.) And although it's been talked about for years, we still don't have a major orchestra-based outdoor festival, like a Tanglewood or a Ravinia, in the province.

Here in Toronto, the TSO is on vacation, and the summer's orchestral pickings are especially slim. For the next two months there are only three classical orchestral concerts to be heard – and, unfortunately, two of them are on the same night!

The National Youth Orchestra comes to town (August 3), as part of its 50th-anniversary cross-Canada tour. Led by maestro Jacques Lacombe, the orchestra will play a demanding programme: Dukas' *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, Ravel's *La Valse*, Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*, and *Sur les rives du Saint-Maurice* by the late Canadian composer Jacques Hétu. This year they'll forsake their traditional venue of Roy Thomson Hall for the more intimate Koerner Hall at the Royal Conservatory.

On the evening of August 7, music lovers will have to choose between the Kindred Spirits Orchestra at the Glenn Gould Studio and the Toronto Summer Music Festival Ensemble at the U of T's Macmillan Theatre. Under the baton of Kristian Alexander, Kindred Spirits, which just finished its first year of operation, will perform Beethoven's *Symphony No. 4*, and Mozart's *Piano Concert No. 23*, with Hyuntak Lee as soloist. Toronto Summer Music offers Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and a new work by Canadian composer Glen Buhr. The vocal soloists in the Mahler will be mezzo Roxana Constantinescu and tenor Gordon Geitz, and the performance will be conducted by Agnes Grossmann.

That's pretty much it for orchestra concerts in Toronto – but if we cast our gaze beyond Steeles Avenue, the picture brightens somewhat. There are orchestras out there – they're just hiding. (Hiding an orchestra may sound as unlikely as hiding an elephant, but Ontario is a



Conductors Agnes Grossmann and Kristian Alexander.

big place.)

The closest spot to Toronto to hear orchestral concerts this summer is Hamilton, where many Brott Festival concerts feature Boris Brott's National Academy Orchestra. Programming is varied, ranging from a Gershwin concert (July 7) and an Elvis tribute (August 4) to Mahler's *Symphony No. 4* (July 17), with Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* as a grand finale (August 20). A total of 10 orchestral concerts are presented in venues in and around Hamilton – see Festival Listings for details.

Some other festivals, while not primarily orchestral in their focus, do put together some orchestral performances. Included in this category are the Elora Festival, the Festival of the Sound (in Parry Sound) and the Highlands Festival (in Haliburton).

Elora presents its own Festival Orchestra (July 7), in an all-Beethoven programme: the *Symphony No. 7* and the *Mass in C*, with the Elora Festival Singers under the baton of Noel Edison. This orchestra returns to the stage on July 23 in an opera gala featuring tenor Richard Margison and other singers. As well, Les Violins du Roy will pay Elora a visit (July 17) with a programme that departs from their usual baroque fare: music by Rossini, Schubert, Brahms and Canadian composer Michael Oesterle. Eric Paetkau conducts.

In Parry Sound, the Festival Chamber Orchestra will perform with the Elmer Iseler Singers in Bach's *B Minor Mass* (July 30), under the baton of Lydia Adams. And at the Highlands Festival, Kerry Stratton's Grand Salon Orchestra presents "Vera to Victory," a World War II-themed tribute to the singer Vera Lynn. On this occasion the featured vocalist will be Barbara Sadegur.

And for those who are unable to take in the National Youth Orchestra of Canada in Toronto, there are a few more opportunities throughout in the area this summer. They'll be playing in London (July 24), and two days later they'll perform in Kingston. (See Listings Beyond the GTA for details.) And Stratford Summer Music has a special NYCO concert (July 25), featuring tenor Ben Heppner singing Wagner highlights. Also in Stratford, the Stratford Symphony Orchestra plays a programme with the Madawaska String Quartet and clarinetist Jerome Summers (July 10).

Where else? Quebec's summer festivals usually feature the province's leading orchestras, and this year is no exception. The Quebec Symphony Orchestra plays at the Lanaudière Festival, at Joliette (July 17), and at Domaine Forget, east of Quebec City (July 23). And the Montreal Symphony Orchestra appears at the Orford Festival, in the Eastern Townships (August 5 and 8), led by Kent Nagano. Orford also presents its own Academy Orchestra (August 4 and 15).

Furthermore, orchestras from beyond Quebec's borders are often presented at the province's festivals (something that rarely happens in Ontario). This year, Lanaudière hosts the Pittsburgh Symphony (July 24) and also the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen (July 30-August 1). And Tafelmusik's only appearance in Canada this summer (on the morning of August 8) takes place at the Orford Festival.

The elephants are out there – you just have to know where to find them. ■

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Conductor Boris Brott.