

The Fredericton Symphony Orchestra played its fortieth anniversary concert on November 6 in the packed Christ Church Cathedral. This jolly occasion celebrated quite an accomplishment. In his recollections, one of the founders, Ronald MacDonald, the concertmaster, writes, "At first we were too small to be called an orchestra so we were just the 'Chamber Players'. Later, as we grew, we became the 'Chamber Orchestra', and now still larger, we are the Fredericton Symphony celebrating our fortieth anniversary and looking forward to our fifth decade. I suspect that there are few communities of Fredericton's size in Canada able to claim such an achievement."

The president of the orchestra, violinist Libby Cassidy, compiled on Bristol board a list of about 500 people who had played in the orchestra over its forty years. The orchestra now has about 50 members, ranging in age from teenagers to people my age, all doing it for the love of making music. I can imagine the amount of practice time the individuals put in as well as rehearsal time. They obviously don't do it for fame or fortune. Richard Hornsby is the artistic director; as a soloist he delighted us with Carl von Weber's "Concertino for Clarinet." A previous conductor of the orchestra, violinist David Adams, gave us Beethoven. It's hard to imagine a celebratory concert without the great master.

The concert began with Johannes Brahms' "Academic Festival Overture." It is indeed a festive piece, so familiar and good-humored that it's a delight to listen to. It apparently is a delight to play as well. Margaret Isaacs, a clarinetist, writes in her program notes, "The orchestration is imaginative, the writing for each instrument completely suited to their strengths, all of which combines to make it a pleasure to play, as well as a truly cohesive work of art to listen to." This is almost a definition of music—a pleasure to play and a cohesive work to listen to.

A pianist playing Rachmaninov was bound to please us, as Heather Dunham did on this evening. On the other hand, the fanfare by Thomas Nicholson, "That/Which", was bound to confound. The piece was written for this concert by the young Fredericton pianist, once a member of the orchestra, now studying composition at the University of Victoria. Several people described him to me as a prodigy, a virtuoso. I learned a new phrase. The piece was composed in "just intonation", which Hornsby described as "a system of tuning that uses harmonic or 'pure' tuning rather than equal temperament. This piece employs the use of micro-tones (notes pitched between the usual half steps of our Western scales.)" It's often said that training in music helps a child to understand mathematics, and I could see why while I was trying to learn about "just intonation".

Even though I use a cane, I'm nervous in large crowds because people don't seem to realize how unsteady on my feet I am, they jostle me, and I'm afraid they will knock me over. This is particularly true of exhibit openings. But I wanted to see Stephen May's "Songs of Wonder," and so I braved the crowds at Gallery 78. I was rewarded with a view of an especially audacious painting, "Laundry Day, 2016." I sat in a comfortable chair and let the crowd surge around me while I tried to understand what made the painting different. Stephen wasn't able to tell me, and furthermore he said it wasn't his favourite piece in the show. Looking at it later on Gallery 78's website, I still couldn't put my finger on why I was so attracted to it.

My daughter came home from Portland Maine so that we could watch the election returns together. We are both dual citizens. You can probably guess who we voted for. She brought corned beef so I could make us a New England Boiled Dinner, my soul food. One night we went out to the Japanese sushi restaurant TomoTachi, a completely different aesthetic of food. I helped Grace “run lines” for a comedy she will be in soon. All week long different cultures and several kinds of arts and strange politics and history were mixed up with celebrity and entertainment. Discussions of the election dominated—friends dropping by, the delivery man at the door, our distraught aunt and gay friend on the phone, the waitress at the Delta. Why did this happen they kept asking? It didn’t seem like politics as usual. The result of the election seemed more complex, more difficult to understand. I’ll quote Keats once again because it comforts me. “At once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously- I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties. Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”