

Salon, Telegraph-Journal Saturday April 23, 2016
State of the Art

THE CHANGING SEASONS AFFECT US DRAMATICALLY

I sat on the left at the Symphony New Brunswick concert “Italian Romance” so that I could observe conductor Michael Newnham’s left hand. I was spellbound by it—his use of it to indicate “give me more”, or “this is intense”, or “this is tender.” In fact, his whole body and soul seemed to be at one with the music; the baton seemed to be part of his right hand, his shoulders were hunched at one moment, leaning forward at others. It was as if the music were playing through his whole being, not just his brain.

My friend Gwen Martin says that she loves the tuning up of the orchestra, and I realized that I do too. Going early to a concert is like going to see batting practice at a baseball game.

The Vivaldi “Bassoon concerto in E minor” was riveting—mostly because of the music, but also because the bassoon is such an interesting instrument. It looks more complicated than other instruments. I wonder if it is. The bassoonist, Patrick Bolduc, stood in front and that meant that I could see more clearly the instrument and the way it was played. Usually the bassoonist is hidden in the back.

The violinists sit two by two, but the one sitting nearer the back turns the page. I wonder if there is a hierarchy in which violinist does the turning.

In my first year of college, I had an assignment to describe a piece of music. I knew little about music although I’d taken piano lessons, played the baritone horn in the school band, and was captivated by “A Song to Remember”, the movie about Chopin. I chose Respighi’s “Pines of Rome.” I’ve been reaching back into my memory to figure out how I listened to it because I didn’t have any music-playing device. I do remember that I worked hard on the assignment and learned to love Respighi. Although Chopin was my teenage love, Respighi was my first adult love. You never forget your first loves. I was happy to be listening to his “The Birds.” Did he like woodwinds more than strings? A piece so entitled would have to use winds more, but I think “Pines of Rome” did too. The violins however did something strange with their instrument to imitate birds—I would never have known how the sound was made just by listening to a record.

The concert featured the world premiere of “Four Poems” by Christine Donkin. She had chosen poems by Charles G.D. Roberts about the four seasons and inspired by them composed a lovely, melodic, yet contemporary piece. The last symphony concert I attended had a ballet choreographed to Vivaldi’s “Four Seasons.” We do live in a place where the change of seasons affects us dramatically.

My daughter and I went again to the Cultural Market held all day Saturdays at the Fredericton Multicultural Association in the former YMCA building. We had food from Iraq, Israel, Turkey and brought home Firni from Afghanistan. "Arts and Culture" is a term which connects the two concepts. Arts can be universal; culture is local. In the April 9th Salon Tom Smart wrote about the visual art of the Singh Twins, their use of their Sikh culture as well as of global art concepts. Culture involves our crafts, our clothing, our home decoration, and our food.

I begin to crave a New England Boiled Dinner, but the only place I know to buy corned beef is in the Saint John market. My husband didn't like a boiled dinner, so once when he was away, I made myself one and ate it for six days straight. My father would make me one when I came home to Massachusetts for a visit. Other cultures seem to cut their ingredients small, precise. A boiled dinner has a whole corned beef and the cabbage, carrots, potatoes are cut in half. Once we had a Japanese student for Thanksgiving dinner. He was visibly shaken when I set the whole turkey on the table. Because I am old, I can be self-indulgent in my clothes; I never wear anything uncomfortable. I will never again wear high heel shoes. Would other cultures allow an old woman to be so self-indulgent?

An organization called Catapult, a section of Ignite Fredericton, sponsored a meeting, "Culture Connects", at the Playhouse. This got me thinking more about the concept of "culture." In this case, the word seemed to be connected to cultural industries, namely the organizations that support the arts. Tim Yerxa made a pitch for a new Playhouse. Lisa Ann Ross, the founder and artistic director of "Solo Chicken Productions", described her vision. Poet Ian LeTourneau, the Cultural Laureate of Fredericton, introduced his plans for literary events. Kate Wallace told us about Arts Link. The audience seemed to be made up primarily of the arts administrators of the cultural industries.