



Creative hodgepodge
or relevant dive?

Description

Concerts “Camille Claudel : dans l’ombre du géant” and “Escales : un piano autour du monde”

By **Luc Archambault**

Auspicious week at **Bourgie Hall**, with two concerts. The first, on Tuesday April 27th, titled *Camille Claudel: dans l’ombre du géant*, from **Projet ClairObscur**, featuring **Stéphanie Pothier**, messo-soprano and creator of this project, with the **Quatuor Molinari**. The second, on Thursday, April 29th, *Escales : un piano autour du monde* with **Louise Bessette** at the piano.

Camille Claudel

Everyone will no doubt remember the film by Bruno Nuytten (1988) with Isabelle Adjani and Gérard Depardieu, and the rebirth of public interest it brought to this artist, who remained in the shadow of Auguste Rodin. Stéphanie Pothier wanted to explore in depth the themes of Jake Heggie’s work: *Camille Claudel: into the fire* (2012), which is inspired by six major sculptures by Claudel, and which link them to biographical episodes or to elements of her psyche.



Stéphanie Pothier – photo: Pierre Etienne Bergeron

It's not only music, vocals, but also the images projected on the backstage. By also including *Trois chants de Bilitis* by Claude Debussy and a string quartet by Germaine Tailleferre, both contemporaries of Camille Claudel (and friend, in the case of Debussy), Pothier seeks to legitimize the work of this female artist too unrecognized, and at the same time claim the rediscovery of all the jewels of all these female creators who lived in the shadows of male giants.

Noble cause, noble project. But one thing nags at me. The central piece behind this whole concert, the work of Jake Heggie, is written and performed in English, while Camille Claudel spoke French. For me, this is at least heterodoxy. One cannot divert the thought of an artist like this, especially when one prides herself on wanting to rehabilitate her. It is even a lack of respect towards Camille Claudel, a cultural reappropriation against which an artist of the caliber of Stéphanie Pothier should have balked, or at least mentioned it. But no, unfortunately, neither in the program's presentation text she wrote, nor during the concert, is this notion of reappropriation ever mentioned.

Escales : un piano autour du monde

As for *Escales: un piano autour du monde*, by Louise Bessette, we are talking here of eleven pieces by as many composers. And that's where the concept hurts. The choice behind these composers leaves one wondering, especially in the organizing of all this material for the concert.



Louise Bessette – photo: Robert Etcheverry

We start with *China Gates*, by John Adams, a subtle and mysterious piece. But which is followed by *Golliwog's Cakewalk*, taken from *Children's Corner*, by Claude Debussy, a vulgar piece of a common heaviness, which bring us back to ground level after the aerial Adams. We then move on to *Colonial Songs* by Percy Grainger, which allows us to breathe after the horrible Debussy. Then to Franz Liszt and his *Bells of Geneva*, taken from *Years of pilgrimage: first year* (Switzerland), a meditative piece that lets us glimpse light through the clouds in a swiss landscape.

But this whole meditative setting is once again turned upside down by an overly powerful Mussorgsky (*The Great Gate of Kiev*, from *Pictures at an Exhibition*). Anthony Rozankovic follows with *The Jungle Juggles*, with just enough spleen to make this piece interesting. Astor Piazzolla follows with *Adios Nonino*, where madame Bessette demonstrates her pianistic technique, in this piece where a very South American sensibility reigns. Then William Stenius Muller follows with *Nostalgia*, a piece where there reigns a flagrant thematic ease, too much roundness in the melodies. Charles Ives and *The Alcotts*, taken from his *Piano Sonata no 2 Concord, Mass, 1840-1860*, settles down, nonchalantly, and is followed by the paraphrase on the theme of *L'âme à la tendresse* by François Dompierre. The concert ends with the weak *La Vielle Capitale* by Maurice Dela, which would have been better left on the drawing board during the assembling of pieces for this concert.

I'll never understand performers who do not know how to weave a coherent concert from various pieces. A theme, yes; but a good concert combines both thematical demands and musical ascents/descents. A trip around the world should not sacrifice the concert's chromatic construction taken as a whole. Especially with the delay afforded by the pandemic, the rumination time should have been maximized, and not end with thism unfortunate hodgepodge.



Feature image: Courtesy of Bourgie Hall

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Luc Archambault, writer and journalist, globe-trotter at heart, passionate about movies, music, literature and contemporary dance, came back to Montreal from an extensive stay in China to pursue his unrelenting quest for artistic meaning.

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2. Louise Bessette
3. Projet ClairObscur
4. Quatuor Molinari
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6. Stéphanie Pothier

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