



## Esprit Goes Abroad

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I find it extremely interesting that quite a few Canadian composers who have had a great deal of success, have been composers who have left Canada (no, I don't think it's a bad thing at all). If you want to get better at anything, you have to expand your worldview on it, and leaving the country for different training is, I think, the best way to do this. Now here we have two Canadians, Samy Moussa and Zosha Di Castri, enjoying a great bit of success and popularity in Europe and the United States respectively, and they've offered us some refreshing material.

Moussa's new work, *Intermezzo for Orchestra*, a commission from Esprit was a piece of reasonable simplicity. Fantastically orchestrated, it contained simple rhythms, straight forward motions, and a clear, crisp idea of what it wanted to be. Yes it could have been about three minutes shorter and we would have gotten the same effect, however that is a small complaint amidst a great new piece of music. I was impressed by Moussa's last set of Esprit offerings *Gegenschein* and *Zodiakallicht*, and this time around was no different. I should also mention that I thought he was an excellent conductor.

Di Castri's 2011 work *Strange Matter* was an interesting listen. This work combined a number of materials that drew me in, including some exotic percussion rhythms and some interesting colours and textures. It occurred to me, near the end of the piece, that, unlike many other large ensemble or orchestral pieces I hear these days, that *Strange Matter* had avoided any truly large and loud proclamations of its presence; No moments where all the instruments came together to play a single, incredibly loud chord. Because *Strange Matter* lacked this moment, it was free to move about as it wished, very flexibly, and I appreciated that a great deal.

I was less impressed with Peter Ruzicka's *Satyagraha*, and Unsuk Chin's *Graffiti*. Both of them suffered the common new music malady of having too much going on at once. I had a difficult time sitting through the second half of *Satyagraha*, although I did enjoy the opening section of the piece, where the string section combined with percussion to create a mesmerizing effect. By the time *Graffiti* came around, I was hoping for something a little less dense to have a go at. *Graffiti*, however excellently Chin handled the instruments less common techniques, combining them to create attention-catching textures, was still too long, and too much. There were so many things going on at any time that I had trouble keeping my focus on even one thing.

The piece to end the night, the third movement of Gabriel Prokofiev's *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*, was almost the opposite of the aforementioned pieces. While they were overwhelming at times, I thought that the *Concerto* was almost underwhelming. Not to say that it wasn't enjoyable. It had a nice melody (I'm a sucker for a nice melody), and a fun, rhythmic drive towards its goal, however I wish that more had been done with the available material. Taking the soloist seat was 16-year old cellist Bryan Cheng who played the part perfectly, and it looked like both he and the orchestra were having a good time playing the piece.

A concert with more ups than downs is one that I count as a success, and so Esprit's first concert of 2014 was a success. The right choice was made giving Samy Moussa the conductor's baton for a few pieces, Bryan Cheng's involvement was a nice touch, and really, the pieces were enjoyable. What more could you ask for?

- Paolo Griffin