

The Nelson Daily News

By **BILL METCALFE**
Daily News Staff

Friday, October 14, 2005 – PAGE 3

When Jasper Wood was four years old, there was a recording he couldn't stop listening to.

"It was David Oistrakh playing Mozart's 5th Violin Concerto and I kept asking my Mom to put it on every day. Then when the record was about to wear out, she asked me if I wanted to learn how to play the violin."

That boy is now 32 years old, and he is one of Canada's foremost concert violinists. He will be playing at the Capitol Theatre this weekend.

Wood has never forgotten the impression music can make on a young child.

"The best thing for me is when I finish a concert I go out there and I'm meeting people and this little kid comes over and has that look. When I was growing up in Moncton, we didn't get too many artists, and I remember when they came through how excited I was and I'd go see them and they'd talk to me. Sometimes they'd come through three or four years later and they'd remember me. It made such a difference for me to know that they were sharing their experiences with me. I like to try to share that."

Wood made his solo orchestral debut in 1987 with Symphony Nova Scotia. Since then he has established a flourishing reputation through his frequent performances with many of North America's top orchestras, as well as solo recitals and chamber music concerts across the continent.

He has been awarded both the Sylva Gelber Award and the Virginia Parker Prize, two of the most distinguished prizes awarded by the Canada Council for the Arts.

Wood is a professor of violin at UBC, and has released three CD's.

In Nelson, Wood will be playing Grieg's Sonata # 3 in C minor, Schubert's Sonatina #1 in D major, Poeme Elegiac by Eugene Ysaye, a Fritz Kreisler arrangement of a Mozart rondo, a selection of songs by Charles Ives, and the Caprice for Solo Violin by Eckhardt-Grammate.

Wood says he is especially fond of the piece by Ysaye, a composer unfamiliar to most people.

"The piece is not a virtuosic piece, it's more like a poem, one long beautiful line. The violin is tuned differently, the bottom string goes down a full step to an F instead of a G and helps give the violin a dark rich sound to get the point across."

Wood will be playing the Taft Stradivari violin, made in 1700, on loan from the Canada Council Instrument Bank.

"It is just a joy to play on such a fantastic instrument. It was a dream since I was a kid. A Stradivari is considered the best violin in the world — you never think you will have an opportunity to play on one, let alone

having a three year loan. I'm loving that."

Wood's mother is a violinist and pianist, and his father was a pianist and piano technician. He is one of six children.

"At one point everyone played. It didn't last forever because some of them decided it wasn't what they wanted to do. But there was a lot of music."

Given the peculiar nature of teenage high school culture, it is not easy to get through school as a classical musician.

"It was difficult time. I give a lot of credit to my friends. Even though it was not the coolest thing in the world to be a violinist, they still supported me, and they said it was cool, they said, 'hey you are good, you're doing something that's really neat, stick with it.' I am grateful to them for that."

When high school was over, Wood had a decision to make: "Am I for sure going to go into this? It's tough when reality hits in and you realize now you are going to have to make money, and musicians typically don't make much money."

"At that time I didn't know how little I knew. I had won competitions so I thought it would be easy, so I made that conscious decision that I was going to go all the way. And then when I got to university (The Cleveland Institute of Music) I realized what I had done — I realized there are a lot of great musicians out there. That kind of freaked me out and I worked really hard, all day and all night practicing as much as I could."

"That's when the real dedication set in. My mom was not there saying, 'you have to practice today.' My dad said, 'Don't come crying back to me in 10 years saying, hey, I need some money, I made some bad decisions. You make sure you understand what you're doing.' That was a big boost."

"I decided 'I'm going to show him I can do it.' That got me working really hard."

Wood decided to go for a career as a soloist, rather than as a member of an orchestra.

...continued on page 2

LIVE AT THE CAPITOL THEATRE: As one of Canada's foremost concert violinists, Jasper Wood has traveled a long road to success, a journey that began when he was only four

"I made myself a deal, I made a five year plan no matter how tough it got, and it went really well. It was an eye-opening experience to get each concert. The competition is fierce, everyone is trying to get the next concert and some people are willing to undercut others.

"When you are starting out you will have to do gigs for free or not enough to pay your rent, so I was lucky to have the Canada Council there so I could build up the resume, get some reviews, do a demo CD. Then people start to take you more seriously, then they start to book you. But it is a tough to get your name out there."

In choosing his concert and recording repertoire, Wood tries to find a balance between established and newer works.

"In concerts, I try to stay close to the mainstream with things audiences tend to enjoy. Depending on the venue I might throw something more adventurous out there. I'm all about trying to introduce people to new pieces, as much as I can without losing them. It's a very tough balance and you try to guess what each place is going to be like and what they will be able to handle.

"In recordings I can be more adventurous, because I know they will sit down and listen to it more than once, at least I hope so. That works well because in the recording world, if something has been recorded ten thousand times why would someone else buy it again, so I will try to record something that is underplayed.

"I grab their attention at the live concert, then they'll be more interested in my CD's, which are more adventurous.

Wood says his career as a performer and teacher is the life he always wanted. Asked what he is trying to teach his students at UBC, he says, "I try to give a good balance of what they need to know technically in order to get around the violin well, and then the musical side that comes along with that. I'd say a well-rounded education. By the time they leave I like to think I've taught them how to teach themselves, so they don't need me. I tell them how to listen with their own ear and how to solve their own problems.

"Like almost like everybody in life you want to make a difference. I want to help them discover something about themselves, feel something, move people. If I can get one person on each night, if I can make a difference to them, its worth it."

Jasper Wood performs at the Capitol Theatre on Saturday at 8 pm. More information about his life and work can be found at www.jasperwoodnet.

N



— PHOTO SUBMITTED

Concert violinist Jasper Wood is in the Queen City on Saturday night

Gramophone Magazine

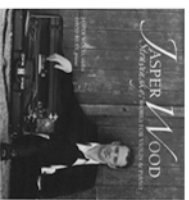
WOOD AND RILEY ARE SELF-EFFACING BUT DISTINCTIVE – RATHER LIKE THE MUSIC, IN FACT

Divertimento. Duo Concertant.
Suite Italienne. Chanson Russe.
Firebird – Bercuse; Scherzo;
Prélude et Ronde des princesses
Jasper Wood *with* **David Riley** *pf*
Endeavour Classics @ **END1010**
(67 minutes: DDD)

Suite, Chanson, Divertimento, Duo – selected comparisons:
Perlman, Canino (97r68) (GML) 566061-2

The three staples of Stravinsky's violin-piano oeuvre, with four rare transcriptions as encores. And encores there must be wherever Wood and Riley play: theirs is a beautiful collaboration. They may not have outside personalities, but they are certainly dynamic and sensitive to the myriad textures and ever-changing direction of these pieces – without getting in the way of Stravinsky's rhythms as Isabelle van Keulen and Olli Mustonen did (Philips, 8/89 – nla). Wood is always a joy to hear, though I detect a bit more temperament from his pianist – even in Stravinsky's own recordings with Dushkin and Szegedi, it's the violinist who leads.

In the *Suite Italienne*, Wood and Riley are up against Perlman at his crystal-and-rod-veeet best (his rendition with Bruno Canino, now relegated to an EMI greatest hits compilation). With that luxurious bloom on his tone and his effortless bowing, Perlman is in his element with these neo-



Baroque comfits. At the start of the second movement of the *Duo Concertant*, Wood's harmonics don't have the crystalline ring of Perlman's – but then whose do? Wood's sound is rather smaller, and sometimes I would have liked greater variety of tone-colour, in slow movements especially. But Perlman's musicianship entertains no sense of risk whatsoever, and as we leave the Pergolesi sweetmeats for the other scores, tension is of the essence.

The newcomers' willingness to push the tempo and force their tone make for a more exhilarating coda to the *Divertimento*, their accents riskier ventures. Here Riley tucks into his *glissandi* with a vengeance, raising some eyebrows while Canino and other pianists on record are much more reticent. In the first movement of the *Duo Concertant* he doesn't always keep the repeated notes under control (Stravinsky himself was surprisingly nimble here). But there's character aplenty in their finale to the *Suite Italienne*, and the violinist's tone is appropriately soporific in the *Firebird* *berceuse*.

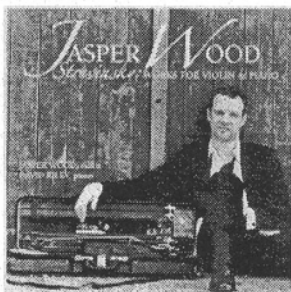
Their musicianship certainly benefits from Anton Kwiatkowski's beautiful engineering, especially with the piano: sonorous, crisp and truthful, this is the best rendering of a piano I've heard in years. My only quibble with the production is a too-long break between first and second movements of the *Divertimento*, such



Jasper Wood forms a 'beautiful collaboration' with David Riley for lush and nimble Stravinsky

that the listener loses Stravinsky's careful setting-up of tempo for the latter. Otherwise, a first-class product and a strong recommendation.

Arved Ashby

Stravinsky - Works for Violin and Piano**Jasper Wood; David Riley****Endeavour Classics END 1010**

The violinist Samuel Dushkin commissioned a concerto from Stravinsky in 1931. The collaboration continued, producing arrangements of various ballets for violin and piano. These arrangements - *Pulcinella* (now named *Suite Italienne*), *The Fairy's Kiss* (*Divertimento*), various movements from the *Firebird* as well as the original composition *Duo Concertant*, form the basis of this new recording from the exceptionally talented Canadian violinist Jasper Wood.

The liner notes include a brief interview with Wood where he explains his approach to playing reduced orchestral scores and careful attention has obviously been paid this. The nature of the piano as a percussive instrument versus the sustaining nature of the violin has been exploited to the benefit of the music and the approach is one that allows great scope for Wood's varied tonal soundscapes.

Although the playing on the recording is superb, I couldn't help feel that the CD was designed to boost the career of the violinist, four glossy photos of whom are presented - in stark contrast to the black and white headshot of the pianist. Jasper Wood's name is featured over and above that of Stravinsky. And although it is obvious that Wood and pianist David Riley approach the music as an equal partnership, the recorded sound is also biased in the violin's favour.

But this is beautiful and sensuous music that is well known to violinists and certainly deserves to be better known by the public - something this CD should achieve.

Kevin Mallon

REVIEW

Violinist's makes impressive use of history, subtlety

BY DANIEL ARIARATNAM
FOR NIGHTLIFE

A local audience got a taste of this country's West Coast classical music excellence on Tuesday.

The Vancouver-based duo of violinist Jasper Wood and pianist Grace Cho performed at Waterloo's Perimeter Institute in a concert conceived to celebrate violinist and composer Fritz Kreisler.

The program consisted of original Kreisler compositions, transcriptions and pieces that the historically important violinist loved to perform. The night kicked off with Kreisler's *Praeludium* and *Allegro* in the style of Pugnani.

Interestingly, Wood, with the use of violin, took a more historic approach to the music. Instead of milking every note with a warm, intense vibrato, he chose to be selective about which notes got the left-hand treatment.

Wood explained that the next work, Schubert's *Sonata in A Major*, was among Kreisler's favourites to perform.

Most striking about Wood's performance of the Schubert piece were the faster second and fourth movements. The *Scherzo* and *Allegro vivace* were clean, precise and well articulated containing energy and momentum. Ending the first half was Kreisler's violin and piano arrangement of the *Rondo* from Mozart's *Haffner* serenade. The highlight of this short work was the flashy cadenza filled with double stops and heavy arpeggiation which Wood's easily handled with a subdued flair.

The second half opened with *Poeme elegiaque* by another famous violinist turned composer, Eugene Ysaye. This unconventional work calls for the violinist to retune the instrument, adjusting the A string down to an F.

As an ensemble, Wood and Cho really nailed this one. The duo accentuated the lush French chromaticism of this work, expressing the tonal colours and shading of the music. Cho provided a dense, unsettled backdrop for Wood to let loose his dark, smooth tone throughout the long expressive lines of the music.

Wood and Cho once again showcased their tight, effective and well-balanced ensemble work throughout Grieg's *Violin Sonata No. 3*. During the slower second movement, Wood demonstrated his ability to make a



FILE

Vancouver's Jasper Wood celebrated the work of Fritz Kreisler at the Perimeter.

long melodic line sing. Crediting his subtlety, he was able to sustain the intensity when the melody called for softer playing.

Finishing off the program was Wood's favourite Kreisler composition, the *Tambourin chinois*. Most notable about this piece, was the slower middle section. Wood made a mature musical decision to downplay the overall schmaltzy quality of this passage, saving the schmaltz for choice moments. The effect was musically enlightening.

The encore consisted of a Kreisler transcription of Wieniawsky's *Caprice* in A minor. Although this show piece called for Wood to whip up and down the violin and across strings with rapid arpeggios and scalar passages — which he did, effortlessly and flawlessly — it was the melodic section that impacted the most.

The young violinist milked the lyricism and shifting rhythmic flow with a convincing use of musical timing.

Wood performs on a priceless Stradivarius violin on loan from an anonymous donor and the Canada Council for the Arts. In his hands, the violin is seductive sounding, with a dark rich tone throughout all registers.

Although Wood's program consisted of some flashy, virtuoso driven work, the young violinist really doesn't come across as a wild showman. He's subtle and well articulated, refined and precise. His playing is more intellectual than emotional. The music comes first and is well served by his artistry.

Classical

JASPER WOOD

*The Great Square Of Pegasus, Music
Of Andrew Paul MacDonald
(Centrediscs)*

In an introductory note to this album, the brilliant young Canadian violinist Jasper Wood explains how his resentment of the sheer difficulty of Guelph-born Andrew Paul MacDonald's *The Great Square Of Pegasus* caused him to abandon the score until its haunting of his imagination caused him to return to it and become absorbed. Could any composer ask for a better tale of conversion? It goes even further. Having been won over by the astronomically and mythologically inspired score, Wood commissioned MacDonald to write him a solo piece titled *Nausikaa* for his touring repertoire, and then a duo for violin and piano titled *On the Wine-Dark Sea*. With almost enough music for a whole CD,

MacDonald then offered to write another work, a second duo titled *Kassandra's Tears*, specially for the recording. All three works were recorded at the George Weston recital hall last year, in collaboration with the Washington-based Canadian pianist Audrey Andrist. The result is two minds connected in a very special way.

William Littler

Opus

Winter 2004

**THE GREAT SQUARE OF
PEGASUS: MUSIC OF ANDREW
PAUL MACDONALD**

**The Great Square of Pegasus; On the Wine-Dark
Sea; Nausikáa; Kassandra's Tears**

Jasper Wood, violin, Audry Andrist, piano

Centrediscs CMCCD 10004

Performance: ★★★★★

Sound: ★★★★★

Andrew Paul MacDonald is a composer to be reckoned with when it comes to writing music for the violin. His Violin Concerto, for instance, released on BIS in 1995, won a Juno for Best Classical Composition and, whether it wins any prizes or not, "The Great Square of Pegasus" is still an impressive recording.

The Violin Concerto's win was in no small part due to violinist Andrew Stewart's extraordinary performance; and with Jasper Wood, MacDonald finds an equally persuasive advocate on this recording. Wood's technical command is jaw-dropping and no combination of notes, no matter how complex or fiendishly contrived, eludes his dexterous fingers. But Wood is much more than mere technique: he's unafraid of making a coarse sound if the expressive demands of the music require it, and there's an incisiveness to his playing that lends his performances an electrifying intensity. And, if this CD is any example, he does not shun "the road less traveled by" as far as repertoire is concerned.

Indeed, the road to MacDonald's music deserves to be better traveled. It may not be cutting edge but it is contemporary, listenable and even brazenly romantic at times. Superbly accompanied by Audry Andrist and served well by a recorded acoustic that is intimate without being in-your-face, Wood performs MacDonald's music in a way that surely must have pleased the composer. If the music doesn't gain a larger listenership through performances like these, I doubt it ever will.



The title track, for unaccompanied violin, is most interesting. What Wood plays should, technically, be entitled "Markab" on the CD as it is only one of the four pieces MacDonald composed (each named after one of the four corner stars of the central square of the constellation Pegasus) that comprise *The Great Square of Pegasus* in its entirety. The others are "Algenib" for viola, "Alpheratz" for cello and "Scheat" for double bass, and the four can be played separately or together as a quartet.

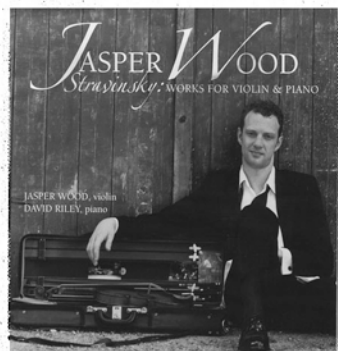
Nausikáa is also for solo violin while *On the Wine-Dark Sea* and *Kassandra's Tears* are for violin and piano. All the music on this CD was composed within the last seven years and owes its creative impetus to some aspect of Greek myth. MacDonald also incorporates ancient Greek compositional techniques into the fabric of the works.

It's a fascinating CD. The intellectual content is there should one wish to delve into it but the music is welcoming purely as music, gradually insinuating itself into the consciousness as it is heard. Take your time getting to know it: the rewards for the patient listener are manifold.

— ROBERT JORDAN

**Stravinsky - Works for Violin
and Piano**

**Jasper Wood; David Riley
Endeavour Classics END 1010**



Toronto Star

March 25, 2004

CD REVIEWS

Classical Music

JASPER WOOD

*Stravinsky Works For Violin
And Piano (Endeavour Classics)*

A new label, Endeavour Classics is named after Captain Cook's ship and professes to bring "both rapidly rising young stars and established performers to classical audiences featuring new or underexplored repertoire."

It is in the latter category rather than the former that this Stravinsky program obviously falls, with the *Divertimento*, *Duo Concertant*, *Suite Italienne* and a few shorter pieces making up the program.

Save for a few major works, Stravinsky's music has become much less played since his death, so this disc is anything but redundant. It is also very well played by a fast-rising young Canadian violinist and his able colleague at the piano, David Riley. Jasper Wood recently won a Canada Council competition to use the Taft Stradivarius and performances like these, full of ardour and musicality, illustrate why.

William Littler

The violinist Samuel Dushkin commissioned a concerto from Stravinsky in 1931. The collaboration continued, producing arrangements of various ballets for violin and piano. These arrangements - *Pulcinella* (now named *Suite Italienne*), *The Fairy's Kiss (Divertimento)*, various movements from the *Firebird* as well as the original composition *Duo Concertant*, form the basis of this new recording from the exceptionally talented Canadian violinist Jasper Wood.

The liner notes include a brief interview with Wood where he explains his approach to playing reduced orchestral scores and careful attention has obviously been paid this. The nature of the piano as a percussive instrument versus the sustaining nature of the violin has been exploited to the benefit of the music and the approach is one that allows great scope for Wood's varied tonal soundscapes.

Although the playing on the recording is superb, I couldn't help feel that the CD was designed to boost the career of the violinist, four glossy photos of whom are presented - in stark contrast to the black and white headshot of the pianist. Jasper Wood's name is featured over and above that of Stravinsky. And although it is obvious that Wood and pianist David Riley approach the music as an equal partnership, the recorded sound is also biased in the violin's favour.

But this is beautiful and sensuous music that is well known to violinists and certainly deserves to be better known by the public - something this CD should achieve.

Kevin Mallon

Wood: A Canadian musical gem

*Virtuoso to play \$3 million Stradivarius at
March 4 show at MY Place*

By **Nicole Fitzgerald**

Whistler

Violin virtuoso Jasper Wood is bringing the unusual treat of classical music to Whistler, March 4 at MY Millennium Place — and on a \$3 million Stradivarius violin, no less.

"There is a subtle difference," Wood said of playing on the multi-million dollar violin lent to him by the Canada Council for the Arts.

"There is a feeling. If you were a painter, it would be like having 100 colours to choose from and then having 1,000 colours to choose from. Now you have all those little subtleties you can change that you didn't have before... What do I do when it is gone? It is not a big deal. I can still do all the same things. It is just a joy to play and I have it for now."

Unlike many guitarists who have a display of rows of guitars, Wood is happy with just two — his own violin and the lent one. With his bow priced at \$12,000, having more than two violins would be a costly adventure.

Like his violin, Wood is a prized Canadian gem.

He is one of the North America's fastest rising classical stars with critics heralding him as having "a control that is rare in violinists his age" and his music as a "gorgeous sound and brilliant control."

Inspired at an early age in a musical family of six brothers and sisters in Moncton, N.B., with his first public performance at a young age, Wood has rose to critical acclaim with a lot of hard work and passion for his art. He made his orchestral debut at 12, which eventually led to him performing with many of North America's top orchestras. From the Dame Myra Hess Series in Chicago and Carnegie Hall in New York to Place des Arts in Montreal and The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., Wood's commanding performances have drawn classical music lovers and just plain music lovers alike.

Wood has won numerous awards including both the Sylva Gelber Award and the Virginia Parker Prize — two of the most distinguished prizes awarded by the Canada Council for the Arts.

His music can often be heard on National Public Radio in the U.S. and CBC Radio in Canada as well as on various labels such as Naxos, Analekta, Disques Pelleas and Endeavour Classics — not to mention

his own CD, *Great Square of Pegasus*, which was recently nominated for Best Classical Album of the Year at the East Coast Music Awards and Favourite Classical Artist/Group

sharing his experiences, knowledge and passion for music with students as a professor of violin at the University of British Columbia.

"I wanted to share what I was



at the 2005 Indie Awards — and all of this before his 30th birthday.

"I put a lot of hours in (to what I do)," he said. "I was sometimes playing six to eight hours a day on a regular basis. You can't keep that up forever, but I paid my dues and put in my time. I am completely dedicated to it."

The Whistler concert will be a celebration of another extremely dedicated musician, the work of 19th-century violinist Fritz Kreisler.

"His style was very unique," Wood said. "He had a gorgeous tone. The pieces he wrote capture people's hearts. He popularized using vibrato. His tone was considered warm. He a good sense of rhythm."

When he isn't hard at work networking his next concert, working on his next CD and preparing for his wedding this summer, Wood is

experiencing," he said of his new vocation, which he started last July.

"You get really great satisfaction from figuring things out on your own and the sharing it with others. I was doing a lot of master classes over the last five or six years and I was looking for the right university to give me the opportunity to continue what I am doing and give me the freedom to work with kids in the way I wanted."

The show starts at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$17 for seniors and students. To book tickets, call (604) 935-8410.

The Performance Series show is presented by the Whistler Arts Council and MY Place along with sponsorship from Caramba Restaurant and Whiski Jack Resorts.



BÉLA BARTÓK

Rhapsodies pour violon et piano n° 1 et 2;
Contrastes, Andante pour violon et piano;
Sonatine; Danses folkloriques roumaines;
Mélodies populaires hongroises

Jasper Wood (violon); David Riley (piano);
Ricardo Morales (clarinette)

Endeavour Classics- END 1015(CD)
Référence: Bartok (Hongaroton)

Artistique **9/8** *Technique*

Voilà ce qu'on appelle de l'efficacité nord-américaine. Que ce qualificatif ne vous amène toutefois pas à voir ce CD, mettant en vedette le violon du Canadien Jasper Wood, comme un objet froid. Par efficacité, j'entends la mise à profit de la technique, à travers une prise de son proche, afin de venir relayer l'impact d'une interprétation qui n'en manque pourtant pas.

De ces œuvres, enregistrées aux deux tiers par Bartók lui-même, Jasper Wood a tout compris: les contrastes, les accents, la netteté, les danses (et donc la pulsation). Le son du Stradivarius est splendide et Jasper Wood ne joue pas "Juilliard" (référence à l'école -et son "moule" propre et aseptisé- pas à l'intégrale des Quatuors par le quatuor du même nom).

Rejoints par un clarinettiste brillant, lui aussi, Wood et Riley donnent une interprétation saisissante des Contrastes. La seule chose qui manque ici est un frémissement émotionnel qui viendrait enrichir humainement la démonstration.

—Christophe Huss



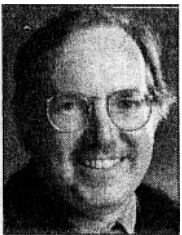
WOOD CARESSES WOOD: Violin soloist Jasper Wood performs during the Windsor Symphony's season opener Saturday night at the Cleary International Centre.

Star Photo: Ted

Wood sets tone for season

Young violin virtuoso, Russell do Scotland proud at Cleary

Windsor Symphony launched its Mosaic season Saturday with a quick trip to Scotland by way of Canada's Maritimes. New Brunswick violin virtuoso Jasper Wood made his Windsor premiere in a perfor-



TED SHAW
ENTERTAINMENT

mance of Max Bruch's Scottish Fantasy. It was a bold and emotional performance to kickstart the 2002-2003 season.

Wood, dressed in a black leather tux, brought big-city flair to the Chrysler

Theatre stage, while WSO music director John Morris Russell drew an equally vigorous performance from the orchestra.

The program also included Felix Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 3, Op. 56, the Scottish Symphony. It was written in the early-1840s after Mendelssohn's visit to Scotland. Bruch's work dates from the late-1800s, and employs many traditional Scottish folk songs. The evening opened with Sir Ernest MacMillan's Fantasy on Scottish

Melodies, a sprightly confection of folk tunes. Outside the theatre, concertgoers were welcomed by the Windsor Police Pipe Band.

Continuing with the theme, Russell wore a jaunty tartan sash, while WSO president Kathleen McCrone introduced the concert in a tartan skirt. The colourful music was accompanied by a display of 11 flags decorating the rear of the stage.

These will remain in place throughout the season since music of different cultures will be featured in later concerts.

Russell, who recently underwent hip-replacement surgery; seemed none the worse for wear, exuberantly leading the orchestra in the Mendelssohn and hugging Jasper Wood at the conclusion of his performance.

The right mood

The entire program was cause for celebration, setting the right mood of exhilaration to begin the season.

Wood is a wonderful musician. His tone was gorgeous, especially in the quieter Andante sostenuto third movement. With his intensity and flair for the dramatic, Wood looks to be on the verge of big things,

A Canadian Nigel Kennedy-in-the-making, perhaps. It won't be long before he has regular dates with the world's major orchestras.

This is part of the plan of Windsor's Russell. During rehearsals this week, he said he wants to bring as many rising stars to this community as he can.

"Windsor is already making a name for itself as a place where young talent can get its first big break," said Russell.

Early performance

In fact, the next featured artist in the Classics series - Canadian Lara St. John, who plays the Sibelius Violin Concerto on Nov. 30 - had one of her first professional concerts in Windsor as a child prodigy several years ago.

Next up for Windsor Symphony are the season's first pops concerts, on Oct. 5 and 6 at Chrysler Theatre. The show, titled On Broadway, will feature Windsor baritone Steven Henrikson, tenor Marc DuBois, and soprano Elizabeth DeGrazia. Tickets, \$12 to \$48, available at the Chrysler box office, **252-6579**.

Wood reaches for eclectic

But he's keeping
away from his
electric guitar

Planning a concert is like putting together a great meal; you have to give people some variety.

"You can't offer people four main courses," says Toronto-based violinist Jasper Wood.

Hence the interesting bill of fare at the Women's Musical Club concert this afternoon at 1:30 at Walter Hall in the Edward Johnson Building at the University of Toronto.

Wood will be joined by pianist David Riley for a program that opens with *Chaconne* in G Minor by Thommaso Vitali (1663-1745) and takes in a Beethoven sonata (No. 8 in G, op. 30 No. 3) before moving to the 20th century with a duo for violin and piano by Oskar Morawetz and Stravinsky's *Suite Italienne*. For after, there's Saraste's *Zigeunerweisen*.

It's a typically eclectic offering from the 27-year-old violinist whose first CD, 13 Caprices - a selection of pieces by Sophie Carmen Eckhardt-Gramatte and Gary Kulesha - received positive reviews, both at home and abroad.

His new CD, Saint-Saens: Music For Violin & Piano, due out this month, contains a selection of pieces by Camille Saint-Saens, performed with pianist Jamie Parker. It is a mix of the well-known (*Danse Macabre*) and less well-known.

One of an astonishing crop of young, richly talented Canadian violinists, Wood is carving out a distinctly different career.

His philosophy is simple: "I look for stuff that people don't necessarily know and that they are going to love."

Indeed he does. He performs the great concertos and performs them well. But rather



JASPER WOOD

Classical

ROBERT CREW

than simply trotting out the Beethoven or the Tchaikovsky time and again, Wood also ranges into less-trodden paths of the violin repertoire, including contemporary music.

Yet surprisingly, he hated new music until fairly recently. But he grew to love it when he went to college and his teacher persuaded him to join a contemporary music ensemble.

"I went overboard about it," he says. "And because you are playing music of your own time, that certainly helps you find your own voice."

Wood, who is from Moncton, N.B., has been playing since he was four. Both his parents are musicians; his father sells and services pianos while his mother teaches violin. "My mom put on recordings to try to encourage me and I would always ask her to put on Mozart's 5th Violin Concerto, with David Oistrakh," he recalls. "I would go

crazy for that.

"Then one day she asked me if I would like to play and I said 'Absolutely!'"

He has five siblings, all of whom played musical instruments at one time or another. "You know what," he says with a chuckle, "practising was the only time I ever got alone."

His talent was evident from early on; he gave his first public performance at five - "it probably wasn't great; it's not like I was one of those Menuhins (child prodigies)" - and made his debut with Symphony Nova Scotia at the age of 13.

That concert, plus meeting a group of like-minded people at high school, encouraged him to continue studying music.

"There was no string department at high school. I had to play the trumpet.

"But I got a lot of respect because I knew a lot of stuff about music and could pick up these instruments pretty quickly. And it helped me realize that music isn't just a thing that weird people do."

He also played electric guitar "because it was the cool thing to do. I had the dexterity and I could play all the riffs for my friends"

But after about six months, he got rid of the guitar and hasn't owned one since.

"I touch a guitar at parties every once in a while."

Wood trained at the Cleveland Institute of Music under David Cerone, gaining his Bachelor of Music degree in 1995 and his Masters in 1996.

Dedicated and hardworking, Wood's eventual aim is to work with the world's great orchestras and he'd to buy his own instrument - he currently performs on an 1820 Giovanni Francesco Pressenda violin on loan from the Canada Council. But there's no hurry.

"I don't want to go too fast," he says. "This is unfolding exactly the way I want it."

Tuesday, January 5, 1999

The Washington Post

PERFORMING ARTS

Violinist Jasper Wood

At the Phillips Collection

A recital devoted to music for unaccompanied violin is a courageous undertaking for both soloist and audience. To couple this challenge with a program that, except for a Bach piece, calls mostly for bravura and mellow sentimentality ups the ante.

But Canadian violinist Jasper Wood's recital at the Phillips Collection Sunday cleared both hurdles with an array of sonorities and techniques that he stylistically adapted to J.S. Bach's intricate Sonata No. 1 in G Minor, an excerpt from Andrew MacDonald's "The Greatest Square of Pegasus," Op 42, and two familiar works associated with the Viennese virtuoso Fritz Kreisler: his own Recitative and Scherzo and Eugene Ysaye's Sonata No. 4, dedicated to Kreisler.

In the Bach, Wood was in total command, lingering ruminatively where cadences pause for improvisational detours and underscoring every voice of Bach's irrepressible counterpoint in a texture driven by sheer metric-rhythmic momentum. MacDonald's piece follows an episodic route through a series of timbres, bowings, glissandi and tremolos – all underscoring the tale of the mythical steed Pegasus coursing through the sky. Here, as in the other works, Wood paired moments of glistening display with a sweet tunefulness edged in melancholy.

Cecelia Porter

Rising talent more than a caprice

Cerovsek, Ehnes, Josefowicz, Kang, Linnebach--the list goes on and on. Has there ever been a time when this country produced a more talented generation of young violinists?

To that list must now be added the name of Jasper Wood, the grand prize winner of the 1997 Eckhardt-Gramatte Competition whose recital yesterday was part of the Music Mondays series at the Church of the Holy Trinity.

Born in 1974, the pubescent Jasper was already appearing with Symphony Nova Scotia by the age of 13, before going on to study at the Cleveland Institute of Music and launch himself as a peripatetic solo violinist.

He has been praised by the Washington Post, broadcast throughout the United States by National Public Radio and recorded in Canada by Analekta, for whom he recently released a fascinating CD album titled *Caprice*, featuring the complete solo violin caprices of the late Sophie Carmen Eckhardt-Gramatte and the very much alive Gary Kulesha.

So what makes this caprice-server special? The same qualities that make his peers special: technical security founded on a rock steady bow arm and accurate intonation right into the stratosphere, together with an innate musicality. He is not just a fiddler. He is a musician.

Hearing him in the Church of the Holy Trinity may not have been ideal: although a hooray church acoustic tends to flatter string tone, it also makes difficult the task of any accompanying pianist.

Given the situation, David Riley accompanied Wood quite confidently, but even with his instrument's lid on the short stick, it surrounded the solo violin with a muddy wash of sound in the dramatic passages.

With any luck the two artists may have better sound tomorrow, when they play the same program in Chicago as part of

WILLIAM LITTLER



the Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concert Series (Internet browsers can find that concert at <http://hvwww.broadcast.com/radio/classical/WFMT>).

The program opened with Edvard Grieg's Sonata No. 3 in C Minor, an appropriate vehicle to showcase Wood's ability to phrase a romantic melody in a shapely manner.

Not that he sentimentalized the music. In fact, in the two Fritz Kreisler pieces that followed (Kreisler, interestingly enough, was once a major interpreter of the Grieg sonata), he so thoroughly avoided the temptation to linger over notes and spin out phrases that the

scores of *Liebesleid* and *Liebesfreud* might almost have been labelled "senza schmalz."

Wood's was a direct and unmannered approach to the music he played. If anything, it invited a stronger contribution of personality on his part. When he launched into the first of Bartok's Romanian Folk Dances, the effect was almost genteel. It was in the last of them that he fiddled up a storm.

And speaking of fiddling, when was the last time anyone championed that unabashed exercise in all-out showmanship known as *Vieuxtemps' Souvenir d'Amerique*?

The souvenir in question, *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, serves as the pretext for a set of variations worthy of the 19th-century Franco-Belgian school of violin playing at its most flamboyant. Little could Vieuxtemps have anticipated that it would one day become a show stopping finale for a 21st century Canadian.

At 25, Jasper Wood has already come some distance from his Moncton, N.B., beginnings, but he promises to travel



TRAILBLAZER: Jasper Wood's repertoire is off the beaten path.

even further if he continues to champion repertoire off the beaten path.

Here, surely, is a wise strategy for any artist entering an already crowded field. We already have more than enough champions for Beethoven, Brahms and Tchaikovsky. What we need is more artists willing to devote some of their attention to climbing the lesser peaks in the mountain range of music.

CD Reviews

Saint-Saëns Violin Sonata no.1 in D minor &
No. 2 in E flat major, Triptyque op. 136,
Danse macabre op. 40

Jasper Wood (violin) James Parker (piano)

DISQUES PELLEAS CD-0110

The D minor Sonata was something of a Heifetz specialty – his two RCA recordings with stalwart accompanists Emanuel Bay and Brooks Smith are required listening – while no one should overlook Mirijam Contzen's deeply felt Arte Nova version. However, these come as part of more general recitals, so Wood and Parker's main rival is a similar programme from Philippe Graffin and Pascal Devoyon (Hyperion), who in place of Saint-Saëns own transcription of the Danse macabre offer the two elegies and Op. 38 Berceuse. Whereas the French team is (not surprisingly) all Gallic charm and elegance, constantly inflecting the music with light and shade, the Canadians emphasise the Germanic inheritance (Mendelssohn most unmistakably) that was a no less vital part of Saint-Saëns complex expressive personality.

This works wonders in the First Sonata, whose Sturm und Drang opening movement and moto perpetuo finale benefit from their more direct and straightforward interpretative approach. Wood launches the latter with thrilling virtuosity, inflecting the music with subtle, quickfire portamentos that suggest a nod in Heifetz's direction. The E flat major Sonata is a sunnier work which exchanges the heroic gestures of its predecessor for radiant contentment. I actually prefer it and so, judging by their affectionate and genuinely touching performance do Wood and Parker. Wood's relatively small-scale, seductively pure sound really comes into its own here, making this a performance that, to borrow a well-known Beecham phrase, gives pleasure simply because of 'the sound it makes'. The Danse macabre is also delightfully done.

JULIAN HAYLOCK



Jasper Wood:
Seductive sound

Enchanting Wood makes this concert

BY GEOFF CHAPMAN MUSIC CRITIC

Sinfonia Toronto has made big strides since it was formed in 1999, and future prospects are good if it continues to chart bold courses with works outside the mainstream.

The adventurous approach under conductor Nurhan Arman was key Saturday in a concert featuring composers from Canada, America and Russia.

But it was hardly necessary to open at Glenn Gould Studio with a brief nod to Mozart, the *Divertimento* he composed at age 16 and which makes few serious demands on a chamber orchestra.

It received spirited treatment and proper rhythmic buoyancy, but doesn't it always? It's not the music Sinfonia's 14-strong strings need to advance its cause.

Bringing Jasper Wood to the program was a very smart move, however, since he's a shining example of our many excellent young Canadian violinists, and one with a penchant for rare material.

The Moncton-born Wood, just 26 and a dashing fashion plate on stage, brought out the independent spirit of the late Alan Hovhaness, whose *Violin Concerto No. 2* was having its Canadian premiere.

The seven movements dramatized the American's Armenian heritage and fondness for Asian culture. Wood's beautifully sculpted phrases made them vivid and immediate.

As the ensemble grappled effectively with the complexities of these fascinating, miniatures, Wood's open luminous tones, seamless lines and impeccable technique charmed the ears, conjuring almost vocal sounds from music he shaped with seductive tenderness.

Wood's playing always sounded elegantly refined without any loss of virility or expressiveness.

His way with keening melodies with pronounced folkloric atmosphere often were a perfect demonstration of his incredible lightness of bowing.

Canadian Andrew MacDonald, his hobbies astronomy and ancient myth, reflected this in interesting fashion with his three-movement *Triangulum*, a concerto grosso portraying fire, a hymn to Zeus and an aspect of the Golden Fleece legend.

The orchestra brought remarkable range of colour to these ideas, which are startlingly direct and sharp-edged, yet still retain ample eloquence.

The musicians' ferocious attack contrasted well with passages of repose, and they played throughout with rock-solid, gripping authority, although the composer's fondness for slurred violin entrances was jarring.

There was rather less to enjoy in Russian Nikolai Miaskovsky's *Sinfonietta*, though its tightly focused structure was powerfully delineated with dramatic heft.

Its slow passages were well exploited, but elsewhere - especially in the finale - needed harrowing intensity was lacking.

The result was a constant sense that musically this work treads water. Overall, however, this show was successful.

Though perhaps it could have done with more Wood and fewer trees.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Polished Wood shines

Jasper Wood is good with his hands

BY ADRIAN LIU

DON'T LET HIS NAME FOOL you. Jasper Wood is a long way from Alberta.

The 27-year-old violinist from Moncton, N.B. came to the Grand Theatre last Sunday to kick off the Kingston Symphony's season. And though you couldn't tell by listening to him, Jasper Wood didn't really want to play the Beethoven violin concerto.

"That concerto is why I went into music," Wood said. "It's my favourite. It needs a mature performer, though, which is why I told myself I wouldn't play it till I was older."

"I set an age limit for myself. I'd start doing it once I turned 30," Wood said. "But then they [the Kingston Symphony] suggested I play it, and I figured I was pretty close."

Along with Naida Cole and Lara St. John, Wood is one of a growing number of young Canadian artists bringing classical repertoire to the fore.

"The Canadian music scene is very supportive," Wood said. "Canada seems to have a way of producing great, classical artists."

Wood picked up the violin when he was only four, and made his orchestral debut at age 13. After studying in Halifax,

Wood attended the Cleveland Institute of Music.

"Not to say anything bad about the east coast, but it is kind of isolated. In Cleveland, I was surrounded by artists from all over the world," Wood said. "But it was always my plan to keep my career based in Canada."

True to his word, Wood returned to his native soil, spending the past few years playing all over North America as a soloist or a part of a chamber ensemble. He's also recorded a few albums, including the forthcoming *Triptyque*, featuring the works of 19th-century French composer Camille Saint-Saens..

[Wood] then nailed a cadenza filled with double-stops and trills that would make any violinist fear for their fingers.

"I chose Saint-Saens because he's not played enough," Wood said. "There's so many recordings out there. You have to find projects to do that will still get people's attention."

Wood didn't have much trouble getting the Kingston audience's attention. The first half of the matinee concert was



Jasper serenades the wood.

PHOTO BY ERIC SCOTT

mellow because of the orchestra's competent but unspectacular renditions of Beethoven's Overture to Fidelio and Schubert's Symphony No. 5.

So when Wood introduced, with energetic octave leaps, the only violin concerto Beethoven wrote, he set a different tone for the rest of the concert. The first movement featured hard-to-reach notes and pinkie-breaking trills, all of which Wood handled without difficulty. He then nailed a cadenza filled with double stops and trills that would make

any violinist fear for their fingers.

At times, Wood's tone was compromised by his effortlessly rapid bowing, but he proved he was attentive to melody in the serene second movement.

Backstage after the performance, Wood was all smiles. "I'm so glad I played it," he said. "It's a mature piece, and now I know I can do it."

"But I'm still a kid at heart..."

Sibelius concert marks orchestral landmark

by MARILYN WIWCHARUK
Special to This Week

Kamloops Symphony Orchestra's offering of *A Sibelius Festival* might well have been named *An Evening in Finland*.

Sibelius was a Finlander and his music is in every way nationalistic, conjuring up images of northern European pastoral scenes and drawing powerful patriotic sentiments. He wrote during the early part of the 20th century, a time when his people were developing an identity and were ripe for a musical focus to their patriotism.

Finlandia proved to be a stirring opener, with its mighty brass chords at the beginning, followed by the quiet but powerful theme which has become the

country's unofficial anthem. The work proved to be a harbinger of things to come.

The Violin Concerto in D minor followed and, for many, was the concert highlight. Soloist Jasper Wood is a young Canadian who has received rave reviews for his ability to recreate lyric poetry. Saturday's audience responded to his astounding technique and ability to put all his energy into his beautiful sound with a spontaneous ovation at the mighty ending of the first movement and with an standing ovation at the work's end.

The concerto ranges from ethereal serenity to stunning virtuosity and this wonderful violinist had it all. Full marks go to the orchestra for an exciting performance.

Bruce Dunn describes *Symphony No. 2 in D major* as the most overtly nationalistic of all Sibelius symphonies. The musicians took great joy in performing

it, as the audience did in hearing it. This was symphonic music at its best and closed a concert which could only be described as a landmark of excellence.

KAMLOOPS SYMPHONY
BRUCE DUNN, MUSIC DIRECTOR

A Sibelius Festival

SPONSORED BY

JIM KEITH & BILL MCINTOSH
RBC DOMINION SECURITIES
MEMBER OF ROYAL FINANCIAL GROUP

THE PLAZA
A Heritage HOTEL

SOLOIST
Jasper Wood,
violin

SIBELIUS
Finlandia
Violin Concerto
Symphony #2

SATURDAY
March 10, 2001
8 PM Sagebrush Theatre

TICKETS
Kamloops Live! Box Office 374-5483

Kamloops Symphony
CITY OF KAMLOOPS
KAMLOOPS COUNCIL

Kamloops Daily News

March 1, 2001

Celebrating Beethoven; symphony, soloist soar

CONCERT REVIEW

Sabrina Mehra

IT WAS A FULL HOUSE AT THE GRAND Masterworks Series One on Sunday afternoon, and conductor Glen Fast thanked the audience at the start of the concert for their patronage during a difficult time, in the world's history.

In his introduction to the first performance of the new season, Fast stressed the importance of music in healing the souls of North Americans after the acts of terrorism of Sept. 11.

And the selections that followed rousing performances of The Star-Spangled Banner and O, Canada were just what the Maestro ordered: engaging classical music suitable for diversion on a Sunday afternoon.

The first was the overture to Fidelio by Beethoven. Though less demanding on both players and listeners than many other selections by this oft-caricatured composer, this piece from Beethoven's only opera was executed with both spirit and accuracy.

Within the first few bars, this season's incarnation of the Kingston Symphony asserted itself as a unified instrument. The overture is rife with difficult ascending melodic lines, and the execution of these difficult parts was seamless. The tempo changes - and there are many of them - were executed without straining the listener's ear.

Canadian-born violinist Jasper Wood, the soloist in this concerto, proved himself to be a musician even when he was not playing. The music was visible in his hands and face even before his impressive instrument - a 1820 Giovanni Francesco Pressenda violin on loan from the Canada Council - was raised.

This particular concerto gave Wood the opportunity to explore the complete range of his instrument and gave the audience the opportunity to see the true depth of his skill.

The execution of trills, for instance, near the completion of a particularly involved unaccompanied solo section, was fluid so as to seem like there was no work involved.

The depth of his talent was not lost on the audience. Following the completion of the first movement of the concerto, the audience clapped, and while clapping between movements is a fauxpas in traditional concert decorum, his performance warranted the display of approval.

CONSTANTLY ALERT

The concerto, however, did not belong to Wood alone, despite the fact a good portion of the Beethoven concerto is solo violin with minimal accompaniment from the ensemble. Other ensembles might not have worked as hard as the Kingston Symphony to support Wood's solo work during the cadenza sections.

Constantly alert, and sharp and together during the few instances where they supported Wood's nimble-fingered virtuosity with a subdued bass line, the Kingston Symphony did not get lazy when they were in the supporting role.

The Grand Theatre is admittedly not in peak condition in terms of acoustics and seating, but the Kingston Symphony's first concert of the season was engaging, commanding and impressive, and is; hopefully, indicative of Sunday Following Fidelio was a performance of Symphony No. 5 in B flat Major by Romantic composer Franz Schubert. Less demanding on the listener than Beethoven, the performance of this was nonetheless captivating, particularly the Trio movement, which found the violin section playing as one instrument.

The second half of the concert was perhaps the more engaging. It was devoted entirely to Beethoven's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D major

Classical New Jersey

Saturday, September 25

MORE ORCHESTRAS OPEN THEIR SEASONS

Bay-Atlantic Symphony (Jed Gaylin, cond.), Jasper Wood (violin). Ravel's *Le tombeau de Couperin*, and Tzigane; Saint-Saens' *Havanaise*; Bizet's *L'Arlesienne Suites Nos. 1 and 2*. High School Auditorium, Millville.

By PAUL SOMERS

Jasper Wood has won many prizes for his violin artistry in his native Canada. Born in Moncton, N.B., he made his orchestra debut at 13 with the Symphony Nova Scotia. Now in his mid-twenties he finally made his orchestral debut in the United States playing Ravel's *Tzigane* and Saint-Saens' *Havanaise* with the Bay-Atlantic Symphony.

There was, however, no grand sense of occasion when he came on stage to play, nor one when he left amidst great applause. It was as if he belonged there and had been playing with orchestras regularly for years. Admittedly, Millville High School is not one of the state's big venues, but there was an air of professionalism which permeated his presence on stage.

He would have fared well in any venue. From the initial **cadenza* which opens *Tzigane* to the exciting conclusion, this was a performer in full command of his technique and musicianship. All the violin tricks flew off the stage cleanly all the while capturing the gypsy spirit invoked in the title. It was such a bang-up job that the orchestra applauded as well.

Wood's ability to recreate lyric poetry resulted in a delicate performance of Saint-Saens' *Havanaise*. Wood never lost sight of the ever-so-French conceit of presenting the sensuous dance in the guise of a **berceuse*. That balance of innocence and experience, to be Blakean about it, lies at the heart of the piece, and the soloist and conductor Jed Gaylin found that strange spiritual locus and kept it in balance. Nowhere was that better demonstrated than in the subdued tympani driving the gentle rhythm in the **coda* --a felt presence rather than a distinct "part" in the orchestra.

In the concert opening **Le tombeau de Couperin* by Ravel, Gaylin also balanced two possible disparities: rich harmonic language on the one hand and 18th century restraint on the other. With the stress on elegance it was natural that oboist Corinna Wiedmer-Symer's penetrating tone was turned to fine phrasing in several major solos.

Alphonse Daudet's play *L'Arlesienne*, a flop, is redeemed in artistic history through its **incidental* music by Georges Bizet. Far more than in his over-popular opera *Carmen* the composer in this music shows his technical prowess as a composer: variation, **symphonic* metamorphosis, **ostinati*, elevated dance forms, harmonic colorations, and counterpoint are all put on display as if by a tradesman showing his wares.

One of the evening's highlights was the shimmering strings in the Suite No. 2 "*Intermezzo*". Another was the harp and flute duet played by Jan Christensen and Ronna Ayscue in the same Suite's Menuetto. The hypnotic finales of both Suites -- the "*Carillon*" and the "*Farandole*" -- drove along in rousing fashion. The audience responded with major applause.

Yet it was in these Suites that the few problems of the evening surfaced. The horns were too often insecure in their attacks; the celli, though in tune and together in the "*Overture*", still needed to "sing" the long line more; and the violins in one place had a touch-and-go scramble rescued only by Gaylin's sure beat and eye-contact.

My only quibble with Mr. Gaylin was in the final "*Farandole*". I believe that the score calls for a Tambourin, which means "little drum", not the tambourine with metal jingles which was used. I believe a tambourine with jingles would be noted as a Tambour de Basque. I have most often heard the part played with snare drum sticks on something the size of the larger of two bongos.

Mr. Gaylin is to be congratulated on programming an all-French concert. All of the selections are standard repertoire, yet they rarely show up together. More often they are the French leavening in a concert of mixed origin. So it was exciting to hear three composers' versions of the Gallic soul and find them to be just as satisfyingly varied, perhaps more, than all-German, all-Iberian, or all-Slavic concerts would produce.

Wood, Raymond deliver moving recital

BY VIVIANNE ANDERSON
for The Daily Gleaner

A long time has passed since Jasper Wood, then a Moncton teenager, performed in Fredericton as part of the Provincial Music Festival finals.

Now a full-fledged musician performing to acclaim from coast to

Critics' Corner

coast, he gave his first adult recital in Fredericton last night in Memorial Hall, UNB, and it was a revelation.

Wood, as a mature musician, is an artist with a depth to his playing that is remarkably moving. He is a virtuoso performer, yet his tone is sweet and singing and his fortes are notable more for their intensity than their volume.

Paired with Richard Raymond, piano, for an evening of mostly chamber works he was occasionally overmatched, Raymond's fortissimos engulfing everything else.

The highlight of the evening was

the one solo work he performed, *Nausikaa, Opus 49*, written in 1998 by Andrew MacDonald, based on the story of Nausikaa, the king's daughter from *The Odyssey*.

This was an unusual form of program music. Rather than portraying the story graphically, the music presented an emotional history of the maiden who finds the shipwrecked Odysseus as she plays ball by the sea.

The strong melodic line, well-shaped by Wood, was at first restrained, then curious, then filled with wonder, and finally bursting with love and happiness.

The clusters of exuberant notes using all the resources of the instrument, especially unusual bowing techniques, were passionate yet at the same time introspective.

Wood made us feel that we were eavesdroppers on the tale of Nausikaa. He played as if driven by inner voices, giving expression to their prompting.

His mastery of this contemporary work made it easy to see why he is a winner of the prestigious Eckhardt-Grammate Competition.

The concert opened with *Five Melodies Opus 35*, for violin and piano, by Prokofiev.

The violin had a gentle opening melody and the piano accompaniment was too loud to match it properly. It took Raymond the first half of this work to play out his balance problems, and throughout the evening he was on the verge of having too much weight to his tone, to the detriment of an equal balance.

His masterful technique however was echoed by Wood's so that the two instruments were matched in intensity, even if their volume was unequal.

In the Prokofiev, Wood really made his instrument sing. He has a very sweet tone tied to an inner simplicity of approach that is very appealing.

He seems to be internally driven, and plays with a sense of concentration that gives credence to everything he plays.

The first half was rounded out by Bartok's *Romanian Folk Dances Sz 66*.

The piano opened strongly, and the violin matched Raymond's playing, especially in the tumultuous final dance. The harmonies of this interesting work were well brought out, as were the details of Wood's performance.

His phrases are never perfunctory

They are always thought out and carefully shaped, while his mastery of his instrument is such that he can control his playing in the most headlong of moments.

Most of the second half was taken up with Grieg's *Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 3, in C minor, Opus 45*. The opening movement was again out of balance. It has a dramatic opening which summoned dynamic playing from both performers, interspersed with lyrical moments.

The second movement was self-absorbed, the violin going on a passionate journey inspired by its inner demons. The final movement was a broad sweep of musical ideas which summoned a performance that kept the audience on the edge of their seats. The coda was brilliant.

Finally, Schubert's *Rondo in B minor for Violin and Piano, D. 895* is a work of major vision that is all encompassing. The majestic theme has a sweet resolution which summoned beautiful playing from both musicians.

It was a breathtaking performance, in part because of the tempo, but again because of the intensity that was the hallmark of this concert.

The Beacon Herald

STRATFORD / ONTARIO / SATURDAY NOVEMBER 25/2000 / 75c GST INC.



Stratford Summer Music launch

Photo by Scott Wishart

Critically acclaimed Canadian violinist Jasper Wood performs at the official launch of the New Stratford Summer Music last night at Stratford City Hall.

Violinist impresses

An all-too-brief recital by the 26-year-old Canadian violinist Jasper Wood showed us the shape of things to come at yesterday's launching of the New Stratford Summer Music program at City Hall.

Mr. Wood, a native of New Brunswick, studied at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and it was there that he discovered the music of Sophie Eckhardt-Gramatte, the Russian-born composer who lived in Winnipeg until her death in 1974. In 1997 he won the challenging competition named in her honour, and is now building an enviable reputation for himself.

His musical gift has been recognized by a national jury of the Canada Council, which elected to allow him the use of the 1820 Pressenda violin (thanks to an anonymous donor) which he played at City Hall.

Between them, Mr. Wood and the Pressenda made glorious music. First came the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Sonata, in which violin and piano pursue a dialogue, sometimes spirited, sometimes romantic. Mr. Wood's phrasing was wonderfully

fluid, and here, as in the other works, his playing was characterized by a marvelous purity of tone. He followed this with Debussy's serene, impressionistic *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin*, and then a Heifetz arrangement of *Summertime*, from the opera *Porgy and Bess*. And finally, the pyrotechnics of Vieuxtemps' *Souvenir d'Amerique*, which is actually a dazzling and amusing arrangement of none other than *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. The audience loved it. Through all of this Mr. Wood was assisted by the capable and sympathetic accompaniment of pianist Jennifer Tong, of the University of Toronto.

Clearly we have much to look forward to when Jasper Wood returns as part of the New Stratford Summer Music program.

Violinist doesn't just fiddle around at concert

By **CHRISTENE MEYERS**
Gazette Entertainment
Editor

There are fiddlers who know the notes and play with technical perfection.

Then there are those rare spell-binders who go a step beyond, bringing technique, passion and story together to interpret the work anew.

Jasper Wood is such a violinist, and he thrilled an audience of 750 at the Alberta Bair Theater Tuesday night.

"I like Billings, but I'm back to Toronto tomorrow," joked the New Brunswick artist. "It's been nice."

Many elements play into a memorable concert. The audience must hear and see the virtuosity. They must also feel it.

Still a kid, really, but with heavy metal credentials, Wood will likely be remembered among the "top five" of the latter century for his glistening technique and faithful interpretation of the big guns of violin repertoire, both classical and popular.

Tuesday's concert paid

homage to Wood's hero, celebrated violinist Jascha Heifetz, who lived from 1901 to 1987.

Heifetz actually played the same Billings stage Wood played Tuesday - albeit many years ago and in the building's earlier life as the Fox Theater.

Heifetz performed courtesy the venerable nearly 70-year old and recently retired Billings Community Concerts Association. Wood's performance was courtesy the Eileen Orser Classical Series, co-sponsored by Yellowstone Public Radio which has been playing a marvelous selection of the violin repertoire the past week.

Wood set the tone for his joyful performance with "Chaconne in G Minor," by Thommaso Vitali, capturing the hearts of the audience and hushing the house with his strong and steady bowing and dead-on intonation.

Dramatically dressed in a black shirt with red neon folds and black leather slacks, Wood looked like a cameo player in a futuristic movie. His playing, though, is star quality and draws



Jasper Wood thrilled an audience of 750 at the Alberta Bair Theater Tuesday night.

from the past as it cultivates the audience of the future.

The program's mainstay was Beethoven's G Major Sonata, which so charmed the audience that they clapped between movements. Undaunted, Wood

Details

Jasper Wood's latest CD will be released Thanksgiving Day. For more on that, call the ABT at 256-6052.

and pianist David Michael Riley continued their rapport, and the final movement, the flourishing allegro vivace, brought down the house with cheers and whistles.

Wood could have used a microphone when communicating his brief and enjoyable asides. But he is passionate about the work and a purist in the interpretation. He sometimes tapped his right toe and swayed toward the audience, making frequent eye contact with his accompanist Riley, gifted and sensitive in his own right.

Riley, much honored in Cleveland, New York and other famed piano performance venues, is the soloist's dream. As a solo performer himself, he awaits his colleague's nuance, and brings attention to the music and composers through his own talent and star quality.

"We're trying to play a recital as Heifetz might have," Wood explained, noting that the great late violinist kept the first half classical and second a pot-pourri.

The delighted audience relished a global ode to the versatility of the violin - from Prokofiev to Debussy, to Gershwin, with familiar favorites such as Khachaturian's frenzied "Sabre Dance" and Manuel Ponce's elegant "Estrellita."

The encore, a spirited "Yankee Doodle Dandy," brought down the house as Wood proved what fiddlers have known for years: the instrument is appropriate for any style and all occasions.

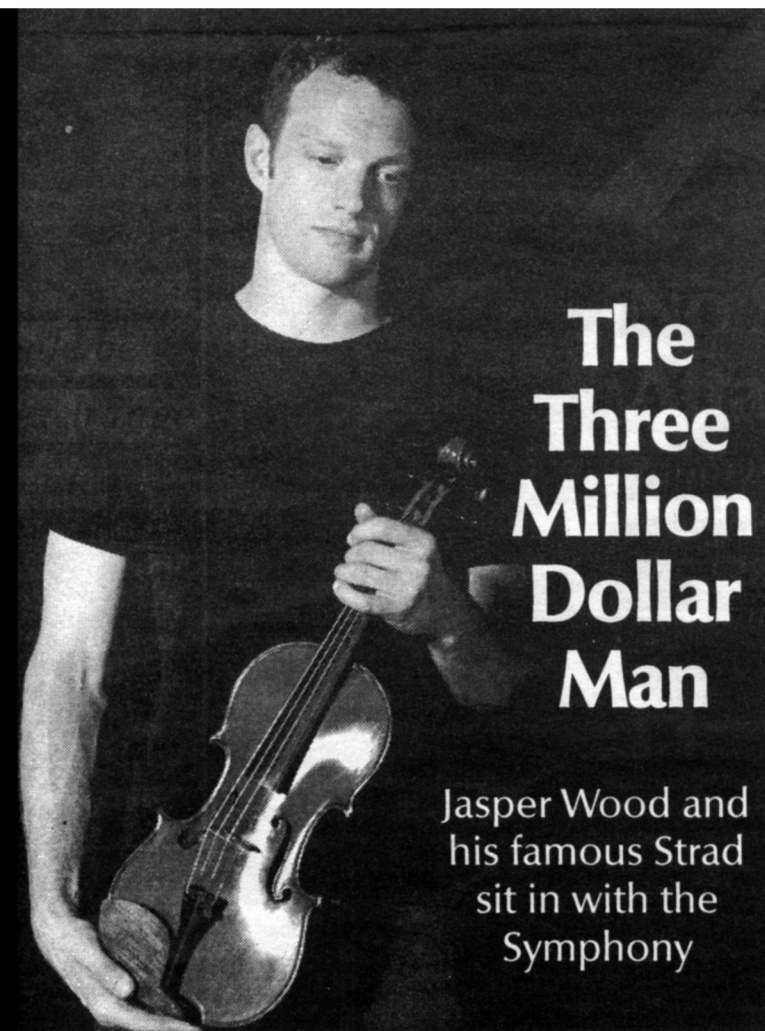
Standing ovation. Well earned.

Christene Meyers can be reached at 657-1243 or at cmeyers@billingsgazette.com

Monday Magazine

April 22-28, 2004

Victoria, BC



The Three Million Dollar Man

Jasper Wood and
his famous Strad
sit in with the
Symphony

Just sit back and enjoy," says violinist Jasper Wood, referring to the Mozart pieces on this weekend's Victoria Symphony concert programme—the final in this season's Classics Series—where he will be the guest artist. "It's just pretty. Everything Mozart wrote is amazing, full of simplicity and beauty. It's like a breath of fresh air."

Stradivari's "Golden Period" is worth the ticket price alone. Appropriately, the venerable violin has its own personality. "When I first got the instrument, we had to deal with each other," admits Wood. "I had a way I wanted to play it and it had a way it wanted to be played;

Wood, at 30, has a life-long relationship with Mozart. "It was my first connection to starting violin," he laughs. When he was a very young lad in Moncton, New Brunswick, Wood insisted on hearing a recording of the fifth violin concerto daily, until the record wore out; then his parents gave him his own instrument and, apparently, boy and violin bonded. (As one of a family of six brothers and sisters in heartland of the Celtic fiddle tradition, to be a small, aspiring classical violinist speaks of great strength of character.)

Fast-forward to present day, where that first violin has now morphed into a \$3 million Stradivarius—the Taft violin—on loan from the Canada Council's Musical Instrument Bank until 2006. This is the instrument he will be bringing to Victoria, and the opportunity to hear this circa-1700 masterpiece from

we had to come to terms with each other. Now it's a joy to play." Part of the reward of having the use of such an instrument, says Wood, is "discovering that connection."

Wood talks about the Taft more as an exciting learning experience than one more prize in a laundry list of achievements, and his conversational style is friendly and low key, not overly anxious to impress. Nevertheless, Wood certainly has plenty of bragging rights: his kudos include the Sylva Gelber award for promising young Canadian classical musicians, an article in the "established artist" pages of *Strad Magazine* (the *Rolling Stone* of classical violinists) and he recently won Best Classical Recording at the East Coast Music Awards for a CD of Stravinsky made with pianist David Riley. As a Moncton native, getting the recognition "from home" was important, Wood says, especially in the classical field. The win has since led to a multi-CD contract—something of a rarity these days, and a timely boost to a recording career that is gathering momentum. Previously, Wood has recorded for Naxos, Analekta and Disques Pellaas, and has recorded music videos for the Bravo! television network. Obviously, Wood has an artistic voice people want to hear, and recording companies are getting behind it.

What is it that fuels this sort of success? It's hard to describe the unique essence that makes one performer interesting and saleable and another a huge yawn. Typically, Wood puts the question in terms of exploration. "An insincere performer doesn't take the listener on a journey somewhere. You think, 'Okay, that's nice' . . . but it didn't move you." A good performer, on the other hand, brings inner emotions and experience to the table. "It's heartfelt. I cry when I play," Wood quips. "Just kidding." He pauses, then considers. "Finding out what kind of sound you consider to be beautiful—that's the dream of a musician."

Jasper Wood with the
Victoria Symphony Orchestra
2:30 pm Sunday, April 25
University Centre Auditorium
Tickets \$22.50-\$40.50 or
\$15 rush tickets at the door
385-6515

—Naomi Lester