

Peter Rudzik Keeping Classical Music Alive

BY LISA NG

Many teachers strive to motivate their students with inspirational repertoire, but not many, like Peter Rudzik, would go as far as composing his own music to keep them engaged.

Approximately two years ago, after searching in vain for some piano duet variations based on a well-known theme; Rudzik, faculty member of Mount Royal University Conservatory, started creating his own compositions for his students. The result was a new album—*Truly Astounding Animals* and a never-ending artistic imagination. “I loved the creative process of writing music. All that accumulated knowledge about piano music simply started overflowing and there is no sign of it ever stopping,” the composer says.

With two piano albums composed—*Wild Rose Suite* and *Truly Astounding Animals*—Rudzik looks at his compositional process as gradual but inherent: “Single pieces came first. After writing two or three of them in *Truly Astounding Animals*, and giving them animal titles, it kind of dawned on me that I started the whole book. Even figuring out the titles was a fun process, it usually happened halfway through writing them. I wanted something original, memorable and slightly outrageous. That’s why a kangaroo is ‘boastful’ or a fly ‘annoying’. A similar thing happened with the *Wild Rose Suite*. I knew I had to separate the children’s pieces from the advanced ones, that’s why I created a different book for them. This year is my 25th anniversary of settling in Alberta,



hence the title “Wild Rose Suite”. Indeed, one of Rudzik’s pieces, “Hot Springs” in the *Wild Rose Suite*, was featured in the International Piano magazine as a selection for a recording contest.

Rudzik’s compositions are characterized by modern idioms—melody tinged with chromaticism, unresolved harmonies, and often, technical challenges. “I love the freedom that contemporary music gives you; there are no rules, right or wrong notes. But most of the pieces that I write are the ones that I personally like to play, listen to or teach. If I had to give it a name, it would probably be ‘bent tonality’”, Rudzik explains.

However, as much as he loves contemporary musical language, Rudzik reminds us that his compositions stand as a negotiation with his classical training and a reconciliation between traditional

and modern idioms. “All composers are influenced by what other composers wrote. I couldn’t write what I did if I wasn’t familiar with Barber, Prokofiev, Debussy, Chopin or Arcadi Volodos’ arrangements. This list has no end.”

Indeed, what sets Rudzik on the path of his personal style was his intense musical training. Being an award-winning pianist in his native Poland and scholarship recipient from the Chopin Society in Warsaw in 1984, making his appearances on national television and radio and in the National Piano Festival in 1987, Rudzik has received his music education under a highly competitive environment. Growing up in communist Poland where everything was state-run and private lessons are inexistent, Rudzik had to go through intense entry exams in order to get into music school to pursue his love of music.

Being one of the five candidates out of fifty to get into Piano Performance at the Academy of Music in Gdansk, Rudzik spent five years completing all the requirements for the Master in Music degree where he studied with well-known professors such as Zbigniew Sliwinski, Grazyna Fiedoruk-Sienkiewicz, Jerzy Sulikowski and Katarzyna Popowa-Zydron whose roots tie to names such as Moscheles, Tausig, Rimsky-Korsakov, Boulanger, Liszt and Chopin. Thereafter, Rudzik took post-graduate studies at the Royal Danish Conservatory of Music in Copenhagen, Demark where he focused on Granados and Albeniz under the instruction of Jose Ribera, who was himself a student of Alfred Cortot.

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In reminiscences of his own training, Rudzik reflects on music education in Canada: “Music education is much less regimented and restrictive here in Canada. You can send your students for exams but you don’t have to. As we all know hundreds of thousands of children take private music lessons and only a small percentage of them will go professionally into music. I think it’s a huge advantage of this system, the sheer number of students studying music, this is how we make sure that classical music is alive and well and stays that way for generations to come. On the other hand, the RCM or Conservatory Canada requirements are less demanding so what I personally do is make sure that my students who are pursuing a career in music are at the same level as their counterparts in Poland, Russia or China, especially on a technical level.”

To Rudzik, art is what makes life worth living, and teachers play a very important role in making sure that classical music stays alive, “the only way to pass on this torch is through educating the young generation”, he says. When asked about his preference of being a teacher or composer, Rudzik says there is so much enjoyment

in being a teacher—discovering new ways to convey an idea to students; a lesson that was so much fun that ran half hour late; a thank-you card or letter that brings about the realization that those lessons were a huge part of the student’s life. But if he had to pick between one or the other, he would choose to be a composer: “...being ‘in the zone’, or as psychologists call it “in a state of flow”, losing track of time while writing a new piece; losing yourself in an activity that you really enjoy is also one of the definitions of happiness.”

It is no surprise that Peter Rudzik’s compositions have received validation from prominent teachers, music departments and students both locally and internationally.

To listen to the recording of Peter Rudzik’s pieces, visit sheetmusicplus.com, type in “Peter Rudzik” in the search box.

About the author

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