

## Calgary pianist pours heart into love songs

**Kenneth De Long**

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### CPO Classic Masterworks

**Katherine Chi, piano; Alexander Polianichko, conductor**

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For the CPO, the night was meant for love: not only was there a full moon in the sky, but, right on cue, there was Calgary's own Kathy Chi pouring out her heart in the grandest of piano love songs --Full Moon and Empty Arms.

But it was not only the moon that was full, so was the Jack Singer Concert Hall, which was packed to the rafters for this the final concert in the CPO's Masterworks series. For the orchestra, this was a happy conclusion to a year that has witnessed many memorable moments over the past months.

The main reason for the full house was, of course, the appearance of Chi performing one of the most beloved of all piano concertos, the Rachmaninoff Second, the finale being the source of the popular song mentioned above.

Since her impressive win in the Honens International Piano Competition in Calgary a few years ago, Chi has developed into a remarkably compelling pianist.

Her performance of the concerto was beautifully poised and remarkable not only for her command of the brilliant passages but for the beautiful shaping of the melodies.

Chi was able to bring out the rich sentiment of the music, but avoided the pitfall of sentimentality. Everywhere there was a control of rhythm and pacing that gave the performance a remarkable sense of majesty and Olympian grandeur.

This must have been a special piano brought in for the occasion, for it is some time since the middle and treble register of the piano has sounded so warm and yet so carrying.

Chi is a strong player and delivered a finely etched account of the solo part, but from time to time to was pushed hard to project against the wall of sound emanating from the orchestra.

Guest conductor Alexander Polianichko brought a full measure of passion to the orchestral accompaniment, but his urgings tended to encourage the orchestra to make more sound than was desirable for an ideal balance.

Polianichko presented an assured presence on the podium, a man of experience who

clearly knows what he wants.

This was particularly evident in the concluding Suite No. 3 by Tchaikovsky. This is music by Tchaikovsky that lies half way between the ballet music and the symphonies, music strong in melody and in distinctive character.

These elements were rendered decisively and with a poetic touch when needed, the performance making a strong case for the music. Ultimately, the score is not as strong as the more famous works, but it is music that is well worth hearing from time to time.

The concert opened with Sophie-Carmen Eckhardt-Gramatte's Molto Sostenuto, a work known to me largely through a fine recording made by the CPO's former conductor Mario Bernardi.

This is certainly one of the composer's most personal the distinctive works, and it was given a fine performance by the orchestra, with the instrumental colours beautifully blended and caressed.

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