

**Concert appreciation: Childlike magic from Peter and the Dinosaurs
John Terauds. May 5, 2013. www.musicaltoronto.org**



Laurelle Lassonde, 8, premieres Chris Thornborrow's Mini Piano Concerto No. 1 at St Barnabas Church on Sunday (John Terauds phone photo).

It is the most obvious thing in the world — in hindsight: A piano concerto for beginner pianists. There's nothing like having a string quartet, aka a real, grown-up orchestra, around you to make you feel special and motivated.

That was but one of several big treats in store for the audience at Peter and the Dinosaurs on Sunday evening.

This collaboration between Riverdale's budding Musica Reflecta series and the Madeleine Collective of visual artists and designers immersed its all-ages audience of nearly 200 people into a multi-disciplinary wonderworld dominated by colourful music and an even more colourful stage setting.

The centrepieces of the evening's concert at St Barnabas Church on the Danforth (across from Carrot Common) were Sergei Prokofiev's 75-year-old classic Peter and the Wolf and Dean Burry's Carnival of the Dinosaurs, which had its world premiere just a few weeks ago.

This was in keeping with Musica Reflecta's desire to cast classic works in a fresh light by pairing them with something new.

Musica Reflecta co-founder Anastasia Tchernikova conducted the 20-piece orchestra with confidence. Together with some witty shadow puppetry by the Madeleine Collective, Burry's piece, complete with whimsical poems to introduce each member of his dinosaur family, felt and sounded very much like it could be another classic in the making.

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Burry assembled his composerly palette from a number of elements, including complex rhythmic interplay and a preference for tonal music. The resulting 12 movements show off each section of the orchestra while presenting contemporary, filmic-sounding music that varies nicely in tempo and mood from one section to the next.

As wonderful as the colourful stage set and music were, their prehistoric thunder was stolen by 8-year-old Laurelle Lassonde, who confidently parked herself at the church's baby grand piano, surrounded by a quartet of strings, to premiere the four movements (lasting approximately 10 minutes) of Thornborrow's Mini Piano Concerto No. 1.

The four movements are entitled: Lacing Up Your Skates, Before the Competition, Laurelle's Lullaby and Cartwheels. Each was inspired by Thornborrow's conversations with this Grade 2 student.

The most beautiful thing of all was how this piece was not meant to show off Laurelle as some sort of prodigy or require her to practice for hours and hours and hours in order to pull it off.

Instead, this was age- and skill-appropriate music for a normal little girl with other things on her agenda than spending every available after-school hour at the keyboard.

The concerto was fun to listen to, containing nice contrasts and writing that was technically easy, but never, ever obvious.

I was so impressed that I went to congratulate Thornborrow at intermission.

"It's one of the most personally satisfying composition projects I've ever tried," he beamed.

I believe him. And I hope this opens the door to other similar ideas to help inspire children to make a lifelong connection to the pleasures of making music.