

Bye Bye Blues Enchanting



Kissing the blues goodbye...

by Susan Goddard

Okay, I hate to admit this but the phrase "It's Canadian" sends thousands of icy shivers up the old vertebrae. Immediately my mind retreats to Mr. Knudson's grade four class where the anticipated joy of an afternoon of film would be shattered by the evil glowing green NFB logo and the inevitable film short on the life of the three-breasted, maroon-striped prairie weasel or a mini-documentary on the half-sister of John A. MacDonald's third cousin Ernst.

Since then, I have changed. I realize that the NFB does some great work and that there have been a number of fantastic Canadian flicks. However, I still harbour some fear —

and when told to go review *Bye Bye Blues*, a new Canadian film by Anne Wheeler, I was less than excited. When I was informed that the film was based on Wheeler's mother and her life on the prairies during World War II, my pulse slowed to a drag. I was not looking forward to this event and the fact that Marc Horton raved ecstatically about the film increased my apprehension.

I must now apologize for any smarmy comment I've ever made about Canadian films. *Bye Bye Blues* is amazing. The story line is simple and poetic and the actors treat the dialogue with respect and honesty. Rebecca Jenkins is amazing as the main character Daisy Cooper. Her portrayal is empathetic, dignified and beautiful to watch. The music is fantastic, and by the end of the film the audience around me was singing along with the actors.

However, the aspect of the film that most appeals to me is the camera work. Vic Sarin, the director of photography, effectively captures the light and form of both India and the Albertan prairies. The scenes are breathtaking in themselves, and if the film had frozen on any of the sun rising scenes I doubt the audience would have complained.

I honestly can't rave enough about this film, everything was enchanting, everything was perfect — just about everything. My one complaint is with the woman who sat beside me and pointed out her neighbour's son (only 3 years old - don't you know) at 5 minute intervals. Don't bring her with you, and there is no way that this film will be disappointing.

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means that he does a lot of commuting. Directing two orchestras in diverse locations may seem unusual, but Mayer points out that the renowned conductor Zubin Mehta divides his time between the Israel and New York Philharmonics.

The Music Director's job is a many faceted one. Mayer is responsible in part for deciding the orchestra's repertoire, working with marketing staff to make the ESO a viable commercial entity, and of course leading the orchestra's corps of 56 regular musicians, a job which presents many possibilities for artistic conflicts.

In fact, it's no secret that many ESO players have had differences of opinion with Mayer, something that he expects and even takes for granted: "It's normal. But I have a lot of respect for everyone who plays in the orchestra and I can only hope that respect is mostly mutual. Based on that assumption, one has to try to bring various artistic approaches into harmony. At the end of the day, though, I am responsible for the interpretation of the music."

Mayer "encourages the players not to be shy about expressing their ideas about the music. They may have a different interpretation than mine, and I may like it. If that is so, there is nothing to diminish your stature in accepting that someone else has an idea that is better than yours."

Perhaps an early-season manifestation of this philosophy was the ESO's recent performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 1. This work, originally scored in five movements, was chopped to four by the composer after a disastrous debut. The score for the original second movement survived although it is still rarely performed, probably in deference to Mahler's own, although perhaps ill-conceived, wishes.

It was at the suggestion of principal second violin Stephen Bryant that the ESO added this "lost" movement to their performance of the Mahler, changing the work in a way which mere interpretation could hardly

match. And in what turned out to be a humorous gaffe, Mayer inadvertently left the score for the second movement in his briefcase on the first night of the performance, resulting in a brief unscheduled intermission while percussionist Brian Jones retrieved the missing score for Mayer.

With lots of time left in his contract with the orchestra, Mayer can set some long-term goals for the orchestra. Currently, "the most important thing is the expansion of the string section. If everything continues solidly artistically and financially, we're going to add two string players a year for the next five years."

"By that time," Mayer continues, "the new concert hall should be built, and that is the other thing we are looking ahead to. There is a very good board in place that has been organized to raise money and so on. Optimistically, the new hall will be built within four years, and this orchestra will sound even better in a good hall than it sounds today."

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