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Multi-sensory experience delivers New Music Festival joy

2006 Centara Corporation International New Music Festival

Concert Review: Holly Harris

OUTREACH is a big buzzword these days, but the New Music Festival took it one step further Wednesday night.

Dynamic Austrian modern dancer Sebastian Prantl reached right into the crowd and hoisted a brave soul from the audience over his shoulder, pulling her onstage into his interpretation of Tan Dun's *Elegy: Snow in June*. It's these moments of pure joy that can catch even those who has seen all 15 years of the world-renowned festival by surprise.

The Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra's mid-week program offered a more intimate evening of chamber music, *East Meets West*, reflecting one of the festival's many themes this year: global fusion. It's always a pleasure hearing eclectic music by the festival's founding composer-in-residence Glenn Buhr, which has been in scarce supply on the WSO stage for more than a few years. *Commedia*, for string

quartet – complete with singing saw and kick-drum – added welcome levity to a week of otherwise relatively ponderous new music slogging. Making his musical saw debut, WSO associate concertmaster Karl Stobbe proved that he could likely moonlight as a street busker. Violinist Daniel Scholz likewise proved his skills as a multi-tasker, kicking the drum while playing his fiddle at the same time. The composer's rock-solid musical instincts allowed the street-savvy disco beat to enter – and leave – at precisely the right time, which otherwise could have dominated the interwoven lines of the quartet.

Distinguished guest composer Chen Yi created a true marriage of east meets west in *Chinese Fables*. Her skillful score, including pipa and erhu paired with western cousins, cello and assorted percussion, resulted in an intriguing work that added a razor edge to the normally delicate textures of traditional Chinese music.

Andrew Waggoner's Livre for solo cello was given an eloquent interpretation by wife Caroline Stinson. Written in four not entirely dissimilar movements, this epigrammatic work seemed to end far too soon, leaving the listener wanting more.

And finally, Prantl's tumbling dance athleticism added visual texture to *Elegy*. Framed by a battery of four percussion players with a superb

Performance by Ivan Monighetti – literally – pulled out all the bells and whistles for a climatic grand finale.