



Putting the accent on education

Robert Rival, resident composer of the ESO

“For a composer writing concert music, there’s nothing more exciting than being the resident composer of a professional orchestra.”

These are the words of **Robert Rival**, who’s been the resident composer of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra since last September.

“For one thing,” the 36-year-old composer continues, “the fact that you’re on-site for all the rehearsals and performances gives these events more weight.”

Rival is the third person to serve as resident composer of the ESO, succeeding **Allan Gilliland** and **John Estacio**. And his move from Toronto to Edmonton last year, following the completion of a doctorate in music composition at the University of Toronto, was something of a homecoming for him. Rival is a native Albertan, born in Calgary – although he doesn’t think that helped him land his job.

“When I applied, I don’t think they knew where I was from,” he points out. “There was an open call for applications, and about 50 composers applied. It was a

thorough process, involving many organizational layers of the orchestra.”

Already, Rival has a promising compositional résumé: his music has been played by Toronto’s Gryphon Trio, it’s been broadcast on CBC radio, and he was a featured composer last year at the Windsor Symphony Orchestra’s Canadian Music

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Festival. But one of the things that gave him an edge with the ESO, he believes, was his commitment to music education.

“I feel strongly about the educational components of the job,” Rival explains. “Every year we select one or two young composers from high schools to write a piece, and it gets performed at an outdoor festival. A background in education and teaching is something that I brought to the table.”

Of course, central to Rival’s two-year residency appointment is composing for the ESO: his job requires him to write two pieces a year for the orchestra. His commitment to the orchestra doesn’t currently allow him much time for other projects. Just before he took up his new position in September, he finished a string sextet that was commissioned by the CBC. Then he plunged into the world of orchestral composition.

Since then he’s finished a tone-poem called *Achilles and Scamander*, to be premiered at Edmonton’s Winspear Centre by the ESO on March 31. That will be closely followed by his *Lullaby* – which will first be heard in New York on May 8, when the ESO appears at Carnegie Hall’s Spring For Music Festival.

“The first half of the program will be all-Canadian: pieces by John Estacio, Allan Gilliland and me,” says Rival, with a justifiable touch of pride in his voice. “I think it’s heartening that we’re devoting half of the program to living Canadian composers.” —COLIN EATOCK