

A Rival To Any Other

INTRODUCING THE EDMONTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA'S NEW COMPOSER-IN-RESIDENCE, ROBERT RIVAL

BY **JERRY OZIPKO**

While still a young musician playing violin in the University of Ottawa Symphony Orchestra, Robert Rival, who originally hailed from Calgary, was mysteriously drawn to want to learn how to compose music.

"I've been immersed in music since I was four, when I started playing violin and when I moved to Ottawa when I was 10, in high school I joined the Youth Orchestra, and later on, when I started my undergrad I continued with the University Orchestra and was just surrounded by this great music and playing it. It left a strong impression on me. I don't know exactly what drew me to composition. I didn't start composing until I was in my undergrad and at first I was quite experimental."

Harmony and Counterpoint classes appealed to him in an analytical way.

"There was a tremendous logic to it and that really appealed to me, and I began to wonder if I could do something like that." Maturity soon revealed to him how sophisticated the masterworks really were.

Upon completion of his doctorate in composition at the University of Toronto, Rival was awarded the John Weinzweig Graduate Scholarship

After listening to examples of his compositions, one would have to conclude that Rival's style, though definitely contemporary, leans more toward traditional expressive language. Two composers with whom he studied had a strong influence upon his artistic development as a



Robert Rival, The ESO's new composer-in-residence. | PHOTO SUPPLIED

composer — Steven Gellman of Ottawa, who studied with Olivier Messiaen and Alexander Rapoport at the University of Toronto, who studied traditional composition in Vienna. "(Rapoport) is an absolute master of counterpoint and the classical style and has just a phenomenal knowledge of the repertoire. He really expanded my understanding of classical structure and just deepened my appreciation of the kind of processes that we take for granted but really are so embedded in how we think about music." He also studied musical theatre composition at New York University and briefly long-distance with Edmonton's Malcolm Forsyth.

The Edmonton Symphony Orchestra has been without a resident composer since Allan Gilliland's departure from that position in 2004, so the recent appointment of Rival as the third individuals to hold that appointment will lead to more commissioned works and premières.

Rival was quick to explain his initial interest in applying for the position of ESO Composer-in-Residence.

"There aren't many of these

positions and there are so many composers and we apply to everything. I think in particular with Edmonton, I've known John Estacio for a while and greatly admire his music. He was the first resident composer in Edmonton and how important that was for him to develop his music and especially his orchestral chops which he then applied to opera and for many years I looked at that and thought that would be absolutely amazing if I could do what he did."

In celebration of its 60th Anniversary Season, the Edmonton Symphony will be performing at Carnegie Hall in New York next May, and Rival will be having a commissioned work performed there. The orchestra's NYC debut will also include works by both of the ESO's earlier Composers-in-Residence Estacio and Gilliland featuring former Edmontonians performing the solo parts.

Rival is married to realist oil painter Chantal-Andrée Samson. The Rival's are expecting their first child sometime in August. The family is expecting to be relocated here sometime in June.