

SIGNATURE

JANUARY 2012



EDMONTON
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA
WILLIAM EDDINS
MUSIC DIRECTOR

ROBERT RIVAL

Meet our new
Composer in
Residence

RACHMANINOFF'S THIRD

Returns to the Masters

LIGHTER CLASSICS ON ICE

Figure Skating's Greatest Hits

WISH LISZT

Liszt at Late Night,
the Masters &
Sunday Showcase

COMPOSER IN THE HOUSE

THE ESO'S LATEST COMPOSER IN RESIDENCE,
ROBERT RIVAL, BRINGS ATTENTION TO
CONTEMPORARY MUSIC AND ITS CREATORS

It took about two years of waiting, deciding and organizing, but Robert Rival has been selected as this season's (and next's) ESO Composer in Residence. He hasn't wasted any time either since starting in July 2011. The ESO premiered his *Scherzo* late in September and his new arrangement of "Silent Night" was played at a recent orchestra Christmas Concert.



IT'S HIS WORLD-PREMIERE PIECE FOR MAY'S ESO PERFORMANCE AT Carnegie Hall that has him on his toes. "I'm probably spending more time thinking about it than I would otherwise because the stakes are quite high," Rival says, adding he has completed the work's full draft but it has been set aside briefly so he can complete other projects. He says the piece, a lullaby, was inspired by his baby boy, Raphaël. "I already knew the people at Carnegie Hall had asked the ESO to write a quiet piece because the others that we're doing are a little more extrovert," he says. "The idea of a lullaby seemed kind of natural because my attention was so focused on (Raphaël) at the time."

The unique experience and benefit of being Composer in Residence is the chance that the ESO may workshop Rival's Carnegie Hall piece earlier than usual. "If they're willing to do that, it would be very beneficial to me," Rival says. "You have a pretty good idea what's going to work, but you never can know 100 per cent." Most orchestral pieces are not practised until mere days before a performance because professional musicians are able pick up new music quickly.

Rival has also taken advantage of his new-found ability to attend ESO rehearsals especially when it's not his work being played. He says if he has a score in hand and listens to the piece play out, it's a tremendous learning experience because live music is so different than recorded music. He explains, generally the harp is a quiet instrument in a live, orchestral setting without microphones, but in a Hollywood recorded film score its sound can be heard above all other instruments. He writes for live performances therefore, he needs to understand how live, untampered instruments sound. He hopes to take it one step further when needed, and consult with musicians about what parts they feel work well for their particular instruments.

His main duty is to compose, and he does much of that in his home with the ESO's precise expectation of his work in mind: to write one long and one short piece per year, in addition to works for the education concerts and arrangements. He has a two-year contract with the chance of it being extended. (Former Composers in Residence, John Estacio and Allan Gilliland, filled the role for at least five years each.) Rival also is encouraged to sift through



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- Robert Rival

MUSICAL MUSE: Robert Rival with his son, Raphaël

compositions sent to the orchestra by other composers. “If there’s something interesting in that pile, he gets to point it out to me and suggest I take a look at it,” Bill Eddins, ESO Music Director and Conductor, says. “It is always useful to have another artistic viewpoint when we are programming.”

Other aspects of the job are quite flexible. Rival says the ESO expects each Composer in Residence to approach the role differently and build on his or her own strengths. He’s done that by creating a few podcasts of interviews with composers and posted them on the ESO website (see sidebar) in addition to speaking to other composers on stage preceding ESO performances for the audience in attendance to listen in. “The way I see my role is to be somewhat of a proponent of contemporary music and of living composers.”

At the time of this article’s interview, Rival had yet to select a winner of the Young Composer’s Project or begin mentoring him or her – another set of duties incorporated into his resident role. The Project is an annual competition open to local high school students interested in composing. It was established in 1995 by the first ESO Composer in Residence (Estacio) and

RIVAL FACTS

- He became a composer by first wanting to be a professional violinist. He realized his skill set was geared for something else and paid heed to his interest in musical theory courses.
- He was still working on his doctorate in composition (completed in 2010 at the University of Toronto) when he applied for the ESO Composer in Residence position.
- His wife, Chantal-Andrée Samson, a realist painter, was about seven months pregnant with Raphaël when she travelled with Rival, by train, from Toronto to Edmonton for the Composer in Residence position.
- Rival’s ESO podcasts can be found at www.edmontonsymphony.com/blog
- More information about his music and activities can be found at www.robertrival.com

then carried forward by Gilliland. “I was always impressed by each year’s composer . . . and their good orchestration instincts. I know I wouldn’t have been able to do that when I was in high school,” says Gilliland.

Expect to hear a piece by this season’s Young Composer’s Project winner at Symphony Under the Sky on Labour Day weekend in 2012. Rival says, “It’s a very special and tremendous opportunity for a high school student to get music played by a professional orchestra and get the coaching along the way.”

Rival acknowledges the resident position gives him a rare structure to work in that he hopes to grow and build on in his future pieces. Gilliland says the position changed his life and hopes the same will happen for Rival. Eddins helped select Rival and likes the program because Composers in Residence are not afraid of looking forward when classical music tends to look backwards. “I think Robert was chosen because of a combination of voice and craft,” says Eddins. “Voice in that he didn’t sound like anyone else. He sounded like himself. And craft in that he had the ability to write music in a way that sounded like himself, rather than anyone else.”

Rival says he studies a lot of musical repertoire that might influence him somehow. And although, he says, his music does not sound like Mozart’s, he admires the great composer’s work for its simplicity, grace and sophistication. “On one hand, I want to make music that anyone can listen to and hopefully find accessible and interesting, and then on the other hand, they find there are layers that warrant repeated listening so every time you listen to it, there’s more to discover.”