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A tight waltz between pop and classical

Andrew Burashko marks 12 years of original Art of Time Ensemble shows with a program devoted to music in three-quarter time.



SARAH DEA / FOR THE TORONTO STAR

“I subscribe to the cliché that there are only two kinds of music: good music and bad music,” says Andrew Burashko, in his downtown condo.

By: John Terauds *Music Critic*, Published on Thu Feb 03 2011

Andrew Burashko likes to take new musical ideas out for a spin. In this case, it’s a spin around the dance floor.

The latest program from the Russian-born, Toronto-based pianist’s [Art of Time Ensemble](#), being presented at Harbourfront’s Enwave Theatre on Friday and Saturday, is all about the waltz. Including Burashko, the show features 12 of the city’s finest performers, and crosses all genres.

The concerts begin and end with classical favourites — the *Emperor Waltz* by Johann Strauss and *La Valse* by Maurice Ravel. In between flows an easy mix of classical, jazz and pop that has become an Art of Time signature.

“I subscribe to the cliché that there are only two kinds of music: good music and bad music,” Burashko says with a grin. “The dream was to create something that spoke to a lot more people than classical music, as I knew it ever would.”

Toronto is lucky that the classically trained pianist seems to have unerringly good taste in the choices he makes.

The most conspicuous pop presence is former Barenaked Lady Steven Page, who will sing four songs, including the candyfloss-boppy “Clifton Springs” from his *Page One* solo album.

“I try to find a common theme for every program that makes a connection between different styles or

different artforms,” says Burashko, who has guided his Art of Time creation through 12 seasons, steadily adding to his audience every year.

“I’m encouraged by the fact that it’s growing,” the pianist says. “I think there are enough people in this city who would dig something like this if they were exposed to it.”

Last year, the group pretty much sold out its whole season. But he’s not resting any time soon: “I want to get to the point where I could easily sell out a theatre like Koerner Hall or three or four nights at the Enwave Theatre.”

Burashko smiles as he explains how the pop side of the waltz program grew out of him hearing Leonard Cohen’s “A Singer Must Die.” As is often the case with non-classical pieces presented by Art of Time, Burashko looked for a fresh take that might bathe the music in a new light.

For the Cohen song, Page will be singing an arrangement by Gavin Bryars. Burt Bacharach’s whimsical waltz, “What the World Needs Now,” gets a dark reimagining at the hands of jazz composer Aaron Davis.

Also on the program is a little something from Tom Waits, which rubs elbows with the more classical stuff. But even the Strauss gets a twist at Burashko’s hands.

“We’re playing the (chamber-ensemble) arrangement by Arnold Schoenberg. But don’t worry, he didn’t change a note,” Burashko says, smiling.

Even as he puts the finishing touches on the waltz program, Burashko is hard at work on future projects.

On his kitchen table sits a 3-D model of the set for Art of Time’s next show, devoted to Orson Welles’ legendary 1938 radio mockumentary, *The War of the Worlds*. It’s coming to the Enwave Theatre at the end of March.

That show will combine video projections mixed in real time, live music and a recreation of the radio broadcast with actor Don McKellar. Burashko also discovered that he was going to need more music.

“(Hollywood film composer) Bernard Hermann only wrote about 10 minutes of music for Orwell,” Burashko explains. So the pianist decided to augment the program with a newly commissioned 30-minute medley of Hermann’s greatest film hits, which include *Citizen Kane*, *Psycho* and *Taxi Driver*.

It’s an ambitious project that should appeal to fans of film, radio and theatre, as well as music.

Burashko is keeping his metaphorical fingers crossed.

“It’s a learning process,” he says. “But I’ve never made the same mistakes twice.”

JUST THE FACTS

WHAT: Art of Time Ensemble

WHERE: Enwave Theatre, Harbourfront Centre, 231 Queens Quay W.

WHEN: Feb. 4 & 5, 8 p.m.

TICKETS: \$25-\$59 at 416-973-4000 or www.artoftimeensemble.com