

The review – COC Studio Ensemble in concert

John Gilks



(front row, l-r): Ambur Braid and Cameron McPhail; (second row, l-r): Jenna Douglas, Claire de Sévigné and Mireille Asselin; (third row, l-r): Neil Craighead, Owen McCausland and Sasha Djihanian; (fourth row, l-r): Rihab Chaieb and Timothy Cheung. Photo: Chris Hutcheson

So, as promised here are my thoughts on yesterday's Ensemble Studio recital at the Four Seasons Centre. It's always interesting to see the Ensemble Studio together; to see how returning members have developed since last heard and to hear the newcomers. This is what we got.

Soprano Claire de Sévigné gave us "Chacun le sait" from *La fille du régiment*. It's a good piece for a young singer and she sang it with spirit and enthusiasm and acted with gusto. Perfectly idiomatic French too of course. She has a lovely voice and is clearly one to watch.

Sasha Djihanian, also a newcomer but seen by me on Cardiff Singer of the World, gave us "Je suis encore tout étourdie" from *Manon*. She has a bigger, darker voice which is still developing. I shall be interested to see where it goes.

Returning bass-baritone Neil Craighead gave us "Di due figli vivea" from *Il Trovatore*. I assume he's understudying Russell Braun in that production. He was very assured and pleasing to listen to. The voice is much bigger and more mature than a couple of years ago.

Mireille Asselin chose the fiendishly difficult "Amor è qual vento" from Handel's *Orlando*. She was obviously challenged by the ferocious leaps and runs but made a pretty decent fist of it.

Newcomer Cameron McPhail sang "Avant de quitter ces lieux" from *Faust*. The voice is very young still but quite lovely and well suited to this repertoire. I really want to hear some more of this guy.

Returning mezzo Rihab Chaieb had, as the previous post shows, dressed up to sing "Voi che sapete" and thus demonstrate her trouser role cred. It's not exactly a challenging piece for a singer of her calibre and she managed it perfectly competently as expected. Nice outfit!

Owen McCausland, also new, sang the tenor aria "Here I stand" from *The Rake's Progress*. This seems to be a recital and competition favourite for reasons I don't really get. He did fine.

Third year soprano Ambur Braid closed things out with “Regarde-le, ces yeux” from Massenet’s *Esclarmonde*. I’m not sure it really suited her. I’ll be interested to see what she does with Adèle in *Die Fledermaus*; a role she is sharing with Mireille Asselin. Maybe I shall have to see it twice!

As always, Timothy Cheung and Jenna Douglas at the piano provided excellent support.

Chris Enns, unfortunately, was indisposed and didn’t sing.