

## Violinist delivers thrilling show

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The performance of Brantford violinist Lucy-Ana Gaston with the Cambridge Community Orchestra on Saturday evening was billed as "sure to thrill," and it fully lived up to that promise.

A very large crowd filled a good part of the excellent performance space in Forward Baptist Church in Cambridge to hear Gaston perform two demanding solo works in the first half of the program. This is the normal concert hall for the CCO and it is visually and acoustically very satisfying. The padded pews are arranged in a large semicircle so everyone is close to the action. The room is spacious in height and width, lighting is abundant and the stage area is free from distractions.

An atmosphere of comfortable informality pervaded, especially when conductor Sabatino Vacca and Gaston came out 10 minutes before the show and invited questions from the audience. Asked about her favourite violinist, Gaston surprised everyone with her connoisseur's pick of Ivry Gitlin, an Israeli-born French player with roots back to Gaston's Romanian heritage through one of his teachers, George Enescu.

The program opened with a spirited presentation of Mozart's third concerto. Gaston was poised and elegant, confidently charging through the two quick movements, then burnishing the sweet tone of her violin with a warm vibrato in the yearning melancholy of the slow movement. After a moment's break, she returned to plunge into a more turbulent style befitting her bright red dress, playing aggressively and flawlessly through the virtuosic Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso by Saint-Saens.

Gaston well deserved her standing ovation and shouts of "bravo" after her flamboyant yet secure performances. Yet the sound from her modern violin is a bit small and was occasionally drowned by an exuberant CCO. This orchestra captures the spirit of the music, if not quite all the pitches. They get very good leadership from Vacca who was relaxed, clear and efficient, but he could not persuade all the players to negotiate all the curves and corners quite together.

He had boldly programmed Brahms's first symphony for the second half, a dramatic work filled with musical challenges. The intensity of this music suggests many more string players than the CCO boasts, and a tuba can't render properly the famous growl of the contrabassoon in this piece. Nevertheless, the orchestra learned much from their attempts to scale these heights and the audience loved all their valiant efforts. And there are some excellent players in the CCO, particularly the concertmaster and principal cellist, most of the woodwinds and the principal horn.

For Lucy-Ana Gaston, however, this was a grand finish to her trip home and by now she has already returned to Vienna where she has lived for over a year.

There she teaches and is a principal member of the Salon Orchestra for Old Vienna, a chamber orchestra without a conductor performing in a hall made famous by Johann Strauss.

Murray Charters is a Brantford-based musician, teacher and writer. His Murray's Music column can be found in Saturday's Expositor.