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Critics' picks

The Ottawa Citizen

Saturday, November 08, 2008

FINE ARTS

PAUL GESSELL

The best-known portraits of aboriginal people have tended to be created by non-aboriginals. So, what happens when aboriginal artists create their own portraits? The answer can be found at a new contemporary, photo-based exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada called *Steeling the Gaze: Portraits by Aboriginal Artists*. See the works of such celebrated artists as Jeff Thomas, Rosalie Favel, KC Adams, Kent Monkman and the late Carl Beam. These works are humorous, disturbing and memorable. Until March 22.

CLASSICAL

STEVEN MAZEY

German violinist Christian Tetzlaff will be soloist when the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and conductor Peter Oundjian perform at the National Arts Centre Thursday at 8 p.m. Tetzlaff will be soloist in *Mambo, Blues and Tarantella*, a violin concerto written for him by British composer Mark-Anthony Turnage. The concert will also include Vaughan Williams' *Symphony No. 5* and Britten's *Four Sea Interludes*. Tickets: 613-755-1111.

JAZZ

PETER HUM

Pianist Chris Donnelly may be the most promising of Canada's many fine jazz players in their mid-20s. That may sound a bit on the hype-y side, but consider the following kudos. When he graduated from the University of Toronto, he won an award for the student deemed to have the greatest potential to make an important contribution to music. In April 2007, he finished second in the Great American Jazz Piano Competition. On his debut solo CD, he jumps off from Bill Evans, bebop and classical inspirations to make personal improvisations with incredible verve. Hear what the fuss is all about at *Café Paradiso*, 199 Bank St., on Friday. The music starts at 9:30 p.m. and there is no cover charge. Reservations: 613-565-0657.

ROCK/POP

LYNN SAXBERG

Nine Inch Nails is finally going to make it back to Scotiabank Place on



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Secret agent band

Peter Simpson

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The Secret Machines Rating 2 1/2

The Secret Machines (World's Fair)

Bluesfest '08 got off to a blistering start last July for the small crowd that was at the main stage an hour or two before the Tragically Hip headlined. Three men, taciturn and dressed in black, took to the stage and pounded out a set of post-prog power rock that thrilled the faithful -- and puzzled a few Hip fans who were keen to be early and up front.

The Secret Machines, out of NYC via Dallas, are at their best when they're putting out a big sound. Their greatest album, 2004's *Now Here is Nowhere*, was a sprawling, epic disc of propulsive energy that dragged the listener along on its journey of thickly layered sounds and enigmatic lyrics. It was, if you like that sort of thing, a masterpiece. The next disc, 2006's *Ten Silver Drops*, didn't reach the same heights, and nor does their new, self-titled disc.

Atomic Heels and *Have I Run Out* are perhaps the most credible additions to the Machines' canon. The latter is another long, brooding sprawl, full of electro squibs and swirls and flashes of distorted guitar and, characteristically, a drum line that supports all and gets almost hypnotic in its determined repetition.

Elsewhere are the problems. The drum line on *Last Believer*, *Drop Dead* is somehow reminiscent of the distinctive drum at the core of *First Wave Intact*, the grand opener from *Now Here is Nowhere*, and it's distracting.

The low point on the new disc is *The Walls are Starting to Crack*, which midway through its 6 1/2 minutes inexplicably wanders into a mushy centre of synth babble that offers little reward on the first listen, and quickly grows tiresome. Memo to all rockers: interludes of incoherent noise only sound good if the listener is flying the chemical skies. Straight, they sound like a Pink Floyd homage gone horribly wrong.

The Secret Machines play *Babylon* on Bank Street in Centretown next Saturday night. Even if their latest disc is not their best, they put on a powerful show of unique rock and roll. See ticketweb.ca or revolutionrock.ca for ticket details.

POP & ROCK

Ode to J. Smith Rating 3

exquisite.

Charlie Fidelman

JAZZ

Solo Rating 4

Chris Donnelly (Alma)

Spinning this CD without a peek at its cover or liner notes will set you up for a shock. Track follows track of remarkably assured solo jazz piano, brimming with creativity and drive.

The pianist is a bounder, jumping from all kinds of inspirations -- bebop, Bill Evans' dreaminess, classical composers such as Fauré and Satie. Who's responsible?

It's twentysomething Torontonion Chris Donnelly. He's a strikingly diverse, mature musician with considerable emotional range (check out his extroverted version of Very Early, or his slyly funny version of Donna Lee) and plenty of ingenuity.

His originals are as compelling as his sparkling covers. Donnelly shows signs he'll develop the fully formed artistry of a Stefano Bollani, Egberto Gismonti or Brad Mehldau. His debut packs a wallop, and we should expect to be just as floored in the future.

Chris Donnelly plays at Café Paradiso on Friday.

Peter Hum

CLASSICAL

Revolutionary Rating 2 1/2

Cameron Carpenter, virtual pipe organ (Telarc)

Cameron Carpenter has the fingers to play just about anything on the organ, and the feet too. For a demonstration of the latter, see the bonus DVD with this release.

As a musical revolutionary, his achievements are marginal, though. Playing Chopin on the organ, the Revolutionary Etude for example, just sounds weird, and loud. Adding bells (literally) and whistles to Bach toccatas and chorale preludes doesn't enhance them.

As for the instrument he's playing, "virtual pipe organ" is just a fancy way of referring to a high-end electronic organ. He plays a pretty good one and has technique to match. If his taste were on the same level, we might have something here.

Richard Todd

RATINGS

Rating 5 A classic of the genre

Rating 4 Excellent

Rating 3 Good

Rating 2 Fair

Rating 1 If your host puts this on, leave.

Your CD here

Send your CD to culture editor Peter Simpson at:

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