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Mike Saunders is a radio broadcaster with over 30 years experience in all areas of on-air production, with a special emphasis on classical and other specialty music. In his spare

time, Mike runs a website called A Web of Fine Music, which can be found at www.finemusic.ca. Mike acts as a musical detective, trying to find music for customers all over the globe. It is a sometimes daunting task, but Mike's knowledge of various musical styles and many contacts within the industry have helped connect many people to the music they love for several years now. Check out Mike's site and see what he's offering on his 'Mike's Picks' page - there's always something interesting! And for personal service second to none, Mike is there to help you with your musical question.

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Welcome to the Fine Music blog! Each week, I'll share thoughts with you on what's happening in the field of Fine Music. That does not just mean classical - Other musical forms such as jazz, popular music and local concert events will also be covered. If it catches my interest, hopefully it will catch yours as well! There is a wealth of music all around us - let's explore them together and see where they lead us.

Elora Festival in full swing until August 1st

I wrote earlier in the month about the wide variety of music festivals within a very short drive of home, with Music Niagara, of course, being the closest of all in Niagara-on-the-Lake. I plan to get up there before too long to catch some of their musical offerings, which appear to be as varied and interesting as always.

Today though, I want to write about the other music festival I enjoy attending every year, in beautiful Elora, Ontario, just a little north-west of Guelph. It has been several seasons now we have escaped to Elora, staying at the same B&B (The Vickerage) and spending the Sunday afternoon shopping in town to support the local economy. It has become one of the highlights of our summer, as we love the town and the friendly people who live there.

Last Saturday, we attended what I thought would be a very well-attended jazz concert at the cavernous Gambrel Barn, just at the entrance to the town. Sadly, there were many empty seats for the Chris Donnelly performance Saturday evening; my best guess is about 200 people showed up for the show, including us, and that's a pity. Those of us in attendance caught a rising young talent just on the precipice of hitting it big (we hope!) in an engaging, easy-going concert that ran the gamut from his own inventive compositions to a lengthy tribute in the second half to the late Doug Riley, an inspiration to Chris and indeed to many of us who knew and respected his music for many years.

Chris is soft-spoken, polite to a fault, quite young, and possesses a fabulous keyboard talent I'm sure we'll see and hear more of in the years to come. Before and after the concert and at intermission, he mingled with the crowd, talking to whomever wanted to chat with him about his music, and that means a lot to concertgoers, I think. That, incidentally, is one of the nice things about the Elora Festival: not only do you get up close and personal with the artists during the performance, you will more than likely have a chance to meet them at the performance or afterwards. Everyone appears at ease and enjoying the moment when music and the beautiful surroundings come together as one.

On Sunday morning, as I did last year, I attended the 11 am service at St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church in downtown Elora, where during the Festival the Elora Festival Singers are the choir performing all the music during the service, with Artistic Director Noel Edison conducting and at last Sunday's service, Michael Bloss was the organist. As observed last year, this is a wonderful way to experience the choir in a setting they are very familiar with, and enjoy the splendour of St. John's Church for about an hour and a quarter on a Sunday morning. I would encourage everyone attending the Festival on a Saturday or Sunday to include the Sunday morning service in their plans.

This is the 31st season for the Elora Festival, which began in 1979 under the title "Three Centuries Festival" with Noel Edison leading things from the very beginning. Still to come during the final weekend of the Festival, Jayme Stone performs at the Gambrel Barn this evening; pianist Andre Laplante performs at Knox Church Sunday afternoon at 4; and next week Trio Magellan kicks off the final weekend on Thursday evening at St. John's Church; a show titled "Give My Regards to Broadway" takes to the Gambrel Barn Friday evening while singer John McDermott appears Saturday night at the Barn; and it is wonderful to see Thorold's favourite musical son, organist Andrew Henderson gives a recital Saturday afternoon at 4 pm at St. John's Church. We so rarely get to hear Andrew nowadays, as he is very busy in New York City most of the time, so this performance will be well worth attending.