

## **MUSIC BY THE SEA MOMENT**

By Pat Carney

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The tall blonde woman leaned over the balcony rimming the Rix Centre at the tiny fishing village of Bamfield, BC and looked down on the sea, where the trumpet soloist sat in a rowboat and parried musical volleys with the True North Brass Ensemble on shore to open Music By the Sea, a week-long mid summer musical feast.

"I can't figure this out," she said, as the crew at the Canadian Coast Guard station across the Inlet punctuated the musical exchange with a cannon blast and yelping sirens. "How can this great music festival be happening in Bamfield?"

Bamfield is a board walk village of around 180 people strung along a coastal inlet at the entrance to the Pacific Ocean on the wild west coast of Vancouver Island. It is accessible only by water, gravel logging roads and floatplane. There is no road linking the two shores of the inlet. Residents commute by boat. It has hosted MBTS for six seasons.

"How many people attend the concerts?" the blonde asked me, gesturing at the glass-faced concert hall, designed as a brightly lit clamshell adjacent to the Bamfield Marine Science Centre, supported by five Canadian universities. Inside the audience was drinking wine, sipping coffee. "And how do they get here?"

"Around 900 attend the eleven concerts," I replied. "They come and go." My brother and I traveled from Port Alberni on the MV Frances Barkley, the sturdy little freighter which transports people and supplies to the logging and fishing camps clinging to the forested shores of Alberni Inlet. We would return by mini-bus, safer on the logging roads than my Toyota Corolla.

"But it is not just about the audience. The musicians come from Europe and all over North America to play at MBTS. They love rehearsing, learning and performing together which they can't do on their concert tours. It is a week-long musical adventure with an appreciative audience."

The Three Fanfares for horn in a distant rowboat and percussion on shore ended, and the crowd on the balcony moved inside to hear Toronto pianist Chris Donnelly play his intricate composition Metamorphosis, followed by a woodwind trio playing Darius Milhaud's Pastorale for oboe, clarinet and bassoon, Opus 147.

The small space creates an intimacy between musicians and audience. My seat was so close I read the black notes racing over the clarinet player's sheet music. A little boy sat crossed-legged on his chair, hands under his chin, listening to Australian classical guitarist Jacob Cordover play a classical Spanish favourite.

Beyond the glittering glass walls of the concert hall the setting sun sunk into a streak of clouds. Some of the gillnet fishing fleet, their holds filled with sockeye, weaved ribbons of wake as they headed for the dock, their running lights winking in the gloom, red for port, green for starboard.

Over coffee at intermission, the blonde woman said she was an engineer who had toured the Marine Sciences Centre that day. She was impressed with its facilities. Waving a biscotti at the audience, she asked: "How can local people afford these city-style ticket prices?"

"Some are volunteers, who billet the musicians, provide transportation and other services. Locals get discounts on tickets," I told her. "Mid week the Chamber of Commerce holds a dinner at the Fire Hall and the musicians stage a free work shop for Bamfield residents. And the bed and breakfast and café operators get extra business."

We settled back in our seats to hear a spectacular performance by Canadian jazz greats Ross Taggart and Phil Dwyer, proficient on both tenor sax and piano, arranger and composer Alistair Kay on trombone, Toronto's Brian O'Kane on trumpet, Bill Coon on guitar backed by Ken Lister on bass and Kelby MacNayr on drums. A barn burner.

At noon the next day the musicians assembled to play Mozart's String Quintet No 3 in C Major K515. They included Canadian violinist Marc Destrubé, of the quartet-in-residence at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., and his colleague Steven Dann, viola; Chicago violinist Elizabeth Choi, and Canadian cellist Nigel Boehm and violist Ronelle Schaufele, both currently based in Calgary.

Canadian composer and pianist Christopher Donison, MBTS founder and executive artistic director, is the visionary behind the concept of the music education centre and attracts the top rated talent to the festival, assisted by Boston pianist and artistic advisor Marc Ryser.

On the ocean beyond the glass walls, the gill-netters and the larger purse seiners set their nets in the wind ruffled water. Two power boats waltzed in each others' wake. A grey Fisheries patrol boat pulled one over to check for catch limits and licenses. The MV Francis Barkley poked her bow around the point. A float plane roared up and away

The musicians were absorbed in their music, listening to and learning from each other, signaling their delight with eyebrows and swaying bodies. Outside the wind dropped, the aspen leaves stilled, the marine station's flags drooped. It seemed all of nature paused to hear the music.

The impromptu quintet's performance inspired the blonde engineer. "I have this idea," she told me. "Why don't I invite my European colleagues to come to Bamfield to present their work-in-progress, share problems, seek solutions and have fun?"

"That is what Music By The Sea is really all about," I said.