

# OSO debuts new director at season-opening show

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I hurried into the theatre after setting up for Elections BC as a Voting Equipment Officer. It had been a busy night of preparation, organizing everything for smooth voter flow. Excited to leave the intensity behind, I was ready to enjoy the OSO's first concert of their 65th season—unaware they were holding a sort of election of their own.

## The Search is On

We were introduced to Candidate Conductor Nadège Foofat, who felt right at home on the KCT stage. She charmed the audience with casual wine and weather chat and shared her impressive global achievements. It felt like a job interview—because it was! Each concert showcases one of four candidates, tested not only on their versatility across genres but also on their collaboration with the orchestra, Board, and audience. With the election on my mind, I wondered what it would be like if politicians had to audition as openly and engagingly as this process.

## Modern Connections

During the pre-concert chat, Timpani/Percussionist, Dominique Bernath demonstrated a singing bowl that was to be played in Andrew Balfour's piece, *Kiwetin-acahkos* (North star): fanfare for the peoples of the North. It was fascinating to see something "new age" paired with Holst's *The Planets* (1916), connected by the concert theme, 'The Sky', and ancient Pythagorean sound healing theories related to planetary frequencies. Balfour's work ends with a deceptive cadence, resulting in a hesitant applause.

Following that sonic appetizer, Foofat shared her upbringing which allowed one hour of TV daily—she chose to watch *Star Trek*. She was eager to nerd out on stage for Jerry Goldsmith's Main Theme from *Star Trek*. Foofat and the players took off on a voyage that evoked a sense of adventure, perfectly encapsulating the spirit of the series. This time, the ending was definite with a crisp, triumphant finish, leaving an enthusiastic rumble throughout the space.

## The Super-Presence of David Fung

Next, the piano was rolled out centre stage, awaiting the agile fingers of David Fung. Watching him play was captivating to say the least, especially as he actively listened to the orchestra, engaging not just when striking keys but also during rests. It was a reminder that performing isn't simply "pressing play" when you make sound; it is everything in between, all the time.

Fung's continuous, fluid movement created a deep connection, particularly during moments that felt like a dialogue between piano and strings. The intentionality from both Fung and the OSO infused

Piano Concerto No. 21 in C Major with power, even in its most delicate moments.

I was fortunate to meet the talented pianist backstage after his performance. I shared how it felt like he was channeling something with a super-presence while playing. He responded, "Mozart is the most transcendental and virtuosic!" When others suggest he play Rachmaninoff or Vivaldi, he replies, "No! Get your virtuoso from Mozart!"

I also had a quick chat with Foofat during intermission, who had an equally infectious love of Mozart, and I quote: "Mozart is the bomb!" She was beaming with joy, loving her Okanagan experience overall, and felt a meant-to-be connection with the program, despite having no part in the selection process.

## As Above So Below

The conductor mentioned that her grandfather moved from England with only five records, one being *The Planets*, and it had been part of her psyche ever since. I too have always felt connected to the piece, and work with planetary archetypes for personal development coaching.

It was a delight to observe Foofat embody each archetype, beginning with Mars - Bringer of War. Mars is marked allegro and maintains an unyielding 5/4 rhythm, driven by an ostinato that persists through much of the movement. In contrast, we were lilted into Venus - Bringer of Peace, where Foofat transformed from a race car driver to a serene guide. The movement featured beautiful solos from violin and oboe, followed by harmonious tutti passages.

My eyes teared up during Jupiter - Bringer of Jolity, due to the epic melody that was later used for *I Vow to Thee, My Country*. Despite the challenging nature of the work, the players were very much enjoying themselves, smiling at each other and aligning with Jupiter's vitality.

'The Sky' themed concert concluded with Neptune - The Mystic, where we were joined by Ancora Women's Ensemble. The sopranos put forth great effort to keep the pianissimo notes supported, then gracefully floated away like a cloud; a neat illusion with pure a cappella singing behind the curtain—the perfect Neptunian essence.

## Final Thoughts

I applaud the OSO for their innovative approach to the conductor search. As the province awaits the rest of the vote count for Premier, I now eagerly anticipate the next three concerts, as if watching a live reality show—Who will be next? What will the program include? Which candidate will they choose? Stay tuned!

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## 10 cool things about Nadège Foofat

• What's the most unusual place you've ever conducted a performance?

I had the wonderful opportunity to conduct the Toledo Symphony Orchestra in a series of run-out community performances a few years ago. Unfortunately, my short stature had not been communicated to the stagehands beforehand, and because of the layout of the church and a large central dais, the only way the winds and brass could see me was if I stood on a chair in between the string sections. All I can say is I'm happy I had training in gymnastics, because balancing on a chair while conducting was nerve wracking!

• If you hadn't pursued a career in music, what do you think you'd be doing now?

I've always had a lot of interests outside of music! I think I'd probably be some kind of architect or engineer if I wasn't a musician. I love discovering how things work and also enjoy figuring out how to make things more beautiful and efficient. While I was studying for my Master's degree at Yale, I was very lucky to be able to study some architecture at the School of Architecture, and learned that the field, like ours in music, has limitless avenues to explore.

• If you could have dinner with any historical figure, living or dead, who would it be and why?

This would be a close tie between Jasmin Paris, who was the first woman this past year to finish the Barkley Marathons and is also a Senior Lecturer at the Royal School of Veterinary Studies at the University of Edinburgh and mother of two, and Sifan Hassan, the great runner and former refugee from the Netherlands, who just won three medals in the 2024 Summer Olympics, including gold medal for the Marathon.

• Who would play you in a biopic about your life?

I don't have an answer for this, but I would choose the great Canadian

Film Maker, Sarah Polley, as Director!

• Who is your favourite Canadian artist, outside of classical music?

I'm going to have to say my mother, Dulcie Foo Fat! She is a Canadian landscape painter, and I was incredibly

lucky to grow up seeing what true devotion to a life in the arts looks like. When my husband and I were married, she gifted us a beautiful painting that hangs in our living room in Virginia. The painting is a ground-scape of the Canadian Rockies during winter, and

the snow is so realistic, it feels like you could just reach out and touch it. It's a nice reminder of home.

• What's the best piece of advice you've ever received, and who gave it to you?

When I was just starting out in my career, my former brother-in-law (who is a painter) told me to accept every professional opportunity that presented itself. I think that was a fantastic piece of advice for a young musician.

• What's a hobby or pastime you enjoy that might surprise people?

I am part of a fantastic running community, and I am working toward qualifying for the Boston Marathon this Fall. This past weekend, I just completed my first ultra-marathon, running over 50 Kilometers and placing second in the long-distance challenge!

• If you could instantly master any skill outside of conducting, what would it be?

Playing the guitar would be a really handy skill to have, and also pretty cool!

• What sport, and what team, do you cheer for?

Any Canadian team during the Olympics! The Calgary Flames in honor of my late father. Every female runner out there making it happen. All gymnastics... Gosh there's just too many options!

• What's your guilty pleasure?  
Coffee Häagen-Dazs!



Nadège Foofat