



## Review: Artists connect Americans with the French

Friday, May 18, 2018 at 11:47 am

What a balmy April evening in which to revel in a concert at the Plaza Hotel.



*Beth Urech photo/For the Optic*

Ron Maltais and Mary Kay Robinson performed an April concert that helped show French influence on music.

With Ron Maltais, we expect professionalism and passion, and we were delighted that the renowned Mary Kay Robinson joined him on flute. Since their program was mainly composed by students of the formidable Nadia Boulanger, we were truly treated to a French connection.

Did Ron know Emmanuel and Brigitte Macron would be in Les États-Unis this week? Peut-être, but I digress.

As Allan Affeldt brought in more chairs, Ron explained that the Knabe Piano is undergoing major improvements by Paul Dixon and Kevin Zoernig.

He announced that the Meadow City Academy of Music's funding can now offer lessons for youngsters in piano and voice with guitar and violin to follow. Las Vegas Rotary's donation allowed students to attend this concert for free.

This generosity shows Las Vegas at our finest. Young people are crucial to our community, and we need to support them in all ways possible.

Before retreating, Ron suggested we meditate while listening to Debussy's *Syrinx*. He left 57 of us staring at the concert grand and wondering what was happening.

Suddenly, from behind, us came a melodic and plaintive flute. The effect was mesmerizing. As the notes ended, Mary Kay Robinson made her entrance in an elegantly simple floor-length teal frock.

Yes, it's no longer politically correct to mention how the woman is dressed, but what if I mention that in lieu of white tie and tails, Ron wore all black with a turquoise bolo?

Next up was "Morceau de Concours" by Faure which was performed with clarity, strength and emotion.

The piece by Gluck raised eyebrows. Why a German composer on the program? Ron assuaged our worries by explaining that Gluck's music sounded so French that French composers imitated him.

How comfortable to be in the company of professionals like Ron and Mary Kay, who interspersed their performances with comments both enlightening and edifying.

Nothing wrong with that in a world where some don't know Ludwig from Roll Over Beethoven.

In introducing Ravel, Ron stated, "Never on the planet has there been a person with such an amazing imagination." He explained that "Jeux d'Eau" eludes a definitive translation. I could hear water drops splashing, trickling, and dashing so I will call the piece "Water Games."

As Mary Kay said, "You can see the big sky in Copland." He started his career in dance bands in the Catskills which explains his lyrical and quirky and often dance-like approach.

While listening to his "Duo for Flute and Piano," the word that came to my mind was "frech" which is German and translates as "cheeky" or "impudent."

After a brief intermission, we were transfixed by the New Mexico premiere of a piece written for Mary Kay by William Simon in which she played the concert and alto flute as well as the piccolo. That kept her and us on our toes.

One's mind shouldn't wander at a concert (or in church), but briefly I wondered why French music enraptures me, especially Poulenc. His "Sonata for Flute and Piano" is haunting with springtime birds calling to each other as the flute interplays with the piano. Too soon the music is over, as is spring.

What a lark to hear music not announced in the written program: "Maria" from Bernstein's *West Side Story* and "Summertime" from *Porgy and Bess*. When George Gershwin implored Nadia Boulanger to accept him as a student, she refused: "We don't need another Ravel or Debussy. The world needs a Gershwin."

We also need more evenings like *The French Connection*. In lieu of an encore, we wafted over to El Zocalo Gallery for a reception.

While sipping champagne, we buzzed around Ron Maltais and Mary Kay Robinson like bees around flowers. Why not? It was April, and we are abuzz with gratitude for the good music in Las Vegas.