

LONDON FREE PRESS Tuesday, March 21, 2000

## **Ailing orchestra's musicians play on**

**By JOE MATYAS**, Free Press Arts & Entertainment Reporter

Orchestra London's current financial crisis is distracting and worrisome, two of the symphony's leading players say.

"It's stressful," said Christine Newland, principal cellist. "We're talking about the livelihood of a great group of musicians and the potential loss of an important institution in the life of the city."

Concert-master Joseph Lanza, the orchestra's principal violinist, said rumbles about bankruptcy are a concern for the orchestra's 27 full-time musicians and 17 part-timers.

"It's difficult because it impacts on our daily lives and our futures," he said. "The only answer we have is to continue to make the best music we can and to be part of efforts to overcome the orchestra's problems."

As featured artists of a major Masterworks program to be performed tomorrow and Thursday nights, Lanza and Newland focused on concert preparations this past week as talk about the orchestra's financial woes flared up again.

The orchestra is looking at \$1.2 million in costs and a debt of \$600,000 as it heads into the final 17 performances of its 75-concert 1999-2000 season.

While its board launches a major fund-raising drive, the orchestra plans to play on.

Lanza, a 13-year veteran of the symphony, and Newland, a key member for the past quarter century, are looking forward to performing as leads in the orchestra's presentation of the Brahms concerto for violin and cello this week.

"It's a very challenging piece. I've always wanted to play it with the orchestra," said Newland. "It explores the whole colour range and technical demands of our instruments. It's a very romantic, emotional work."

It's a long, beautiful concerto, said Lanza.

"It takes 35 minutes to play and it demands a lot of strength, endurance and concentration from the soloists. It's like skating a long program for a half an hour; you've got to do a lot more than just land the quads."

The orchestra's publicists have billed the concert as "Greatness in our Midst" -- a tribute to Lanza and Newland, who've performed solos and doubles with the orchestra before.

"Christine and I have also done a lot of chamber music work together," said Lanza. "I've worked more with her outside of the orchestra than any other musician."

Lanza won his job as the orchestra's concert-master in a competitive audition in 1988. He held similar positions in the Thunder Bay and Knoxville symphonies before coming to London.

"I love it here," he said. "I've performed solos about 100 times during my career, many of them with this orchestra, but I consider myself to be a section player above all else and this is a great orchestra to be in."

Part of the concert-master's role is to work with the conductor to set the style of works, particularly for string players.

"I enjoy studying and learning, asking questions about the conductor's vision and interpretation, being an example for the other musicians and hearing the section come together," he said. "It's magic, a big thrill."

Besides setting the pace for the orchestra, Lanza teaches at the University of Western Ontario and performs regularly with Tafelmusik and Opera Atelier in Toronto.

Newland teaches privately and performs regularly with Orchestra London violinist Sig Martin and guitarist Peter Brennan in a jazz trio.

She recently made an album with a rock group called Picasso's Sun, led by songwriter and guitarist Scott Revington.

"It's Beatlesque and somewhat reminiscent of Oasis," said Newland.

"Scott turned up at my door, inviting me to be part of the CD project. I thought he was asking me to play some cello on one song, but it turned out to be more than that. It was fun because for a change I wasn't reading charts. It was improvisational and liberating."

Newland said she loves Orchestra London and doesn't want to see it die.

She plans to do a benefit concert for the orchestra Nov. 10. She's been promised the use of a \$3-million Stradivarius cello for the occasion.

It's both a benefit for the orchestra and a tribute to a friend, British cellist Jacqueline du Pre, who died in 1987. Du Pre was a central figure in the 1998 film Hilary and Jackie.

"She was the Yo-Yo Ma of her day and a great inspiration to me."

An instrument collector who was so moved by the movie that he bought the Stradivarius has agreed to lend it to Newland for the performance in memory of du Pre.

"He wants to remain anonymous," said Newland. "He heard I had tried the instrument and he offered it to me because he's an admirer of du Pre."

#### IF YOU GO

What: Joseph Lanza and Christine Newland perform the Brahms concerto for violin and cello with Orchestra London and conductor Timothy Vernon; also on the Masterworks program are Gellman's Jaya Overture and Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, the Pastorale

Where: Centennial Hall, 520 Wellington St., London

When: 8 p.m., tomorrow and Thursday

Tickets: \$20 to \$35