

# Tafelmusik and the House of Dreams

by Morgan Luethe

It was clear that Tafelmusik's March 11<sup>th</sup> presentation of Allison Mackay's multimedia program "House of Dreams" was intended to reach beyond what one might expect of a conventional concert. The ensemble, under the always capable direction of Jeanne Lamon, once again delivered an evening of first-rate music making, the sort of which has, for years, established the orchestra as both one of Canada's dearest musical institutions, as well as a leading interpretive force internationally in the realms of ancient music. Playing to an unsurprisingly full house, Tafelmusik



transported the audience at Robertson-Wesley United Church out of the pews back in time to the cultural centres of 17th and 18th century European music and painting.

As mentioned, this concert was designed to affect the audience visually, just as much as it was directed toward their ears. Against the backdrop of an attractively formatted projection screen (conceived by Raha Javanfar), baroque music and painting traditions were married to give the audience glimpses into the unique cultural flavours of five great European capitals. This interesting union of visual art and music, coupled with the narration of Blair Williams (which was both convincing and commendable), gave this concert a sense of plot. More than once, sitting in the audience, I thought that what I was seeing and hearing was more an elaborate and unified multicultural symphonic poem rather than simply a concert of baroque music in five distinct parts.

Musical highlights in the evenings program included the music of more obscure 17th century composers; efforts to expose long forgotten works to listeners are always commendable and appreciated. The not often heard though movingly austere music of the Dutchman Jan Sweelinck, for instance, contributed to an audio-visual portrait of the city of Delft, while the vivacious suite of dances from Marais' all-but-forgotten 1706 opera *Alcyone* helped depict the vibrant cultural life of the French capital under Louis XIV. Aside from the largely neglected music chosen to represent the cities of Paris and Delft (though which, in addition to



Sweelinck, also included the music of the celebrated Englishman Henry Purcell), more familiar fare was selected for other cities on the tour. London, for instance, was explored through an engaging survey of the music and impressive personal art collection of its most famous expatriot German resident, G.F Handel, while the cities of Venice and Leipzig were each represented by their own most famous musical residents, Vivaldi and Bach, respectively. It is for its willingness to bring the music of unknown composers to the fore, however, that Allison Mackay's "House of Dreams" program should be applauded.

The real main attraction of the evening was of course the great group of musicians who brought the whole thing off seamlessly. The Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, well known for being a well-oiled musical unit whose performances are characterized by a deep understanding of the music it plays, gave their audience something more to feast on than just a really great, historically authentic performance; Tafelmusik appeared to us as if they were truly having fun! Milling around the harpsichord, the players seemed more like a group of friends simply having a riot coming together in music, perhaps a skillfully planted allusion to the famous images of Bach and his colleagues doing much the same thing in Leipzig coffee-houses of the 1720's. It is to the credit of stage director Marshall Pynkoski, as well as the Tafel-musicians themselves, that they understand what a satisfying sense of participation and inclusiveness such a comfortable and friendly on-stage persona imparts to the grateful audience that watches and hears them. For me, hearing music being made at such a high level and seeing it made with such ease and enjoyment is the chief reason why a Tafelmusik performance is a memorable thing. We should certainly hope that, before too long, we find these musicians making music in our own little cultural-capital-on-the-prairie once again.



*Morgan Luethe*

Born and raised in Edmonton, Morgan has studied music since an early age and continues to enjoy both performing (at the piano) as well as composing his own music. As a graduate in Philosophy from the University of Alberta, he finds that listening to great music with one's brain, is just as important as listening to it with one's ears. One of his passions is to share the music he loves with friends and family—anyone who will listen really, with the aim of perhaps teaching them something neat and interesting about it along the way.