

Grammy nominated violinist Ehnes back in Vancouver

Thursday, January 17, 2008

Canadian violinist James Ehnes, who earned a Grammy nomination with a recording he made with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, returns Friday to play a full cycle of Mozart concertos with the VSO. Over two evenings, Jan. 18 and 19, he will play all of Mozart's violin concertos at the Chan Centre in Vancouver.



Violinist James Ehnes has been nominated for a Grammy for the Korngold/Barber/Walton CD he made with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra.

Ehnes, who grew up in Brandon, Man., met VSO conductor Bramwell Tovey when Tovey was with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

Their collaboration in 2005 on Korngold, Walton and Barber concertos for violin and orchestra, released in 2007, earned a Grammy nomination for best instrumental soloist performance with orchestra. The Grammy winners will be announced Feb. 10 in Los Angeles.

"This was a particularly fun project because the Vancouver symphony I've known for a number of years and the conductor, Bramwell Tovey, is one of my oldest and closest musical friends," Ehnes told CBC Radio cultural affairs show Q on Thursday.

Ehnes said he learned about the nomination last December when he opened his e-mail to a flood of messages congratulating him.

Ehnes describes the Walton as the most difficult piece, for both violinist and orchestra, while the Korngold, the first track on the CD, is the most romantic. "This is a piece that I really love. It's really romantic, but the more you get to know it, the more things you see going on there in the music," he said.

"When Bramwell Tovey was first being considered for the job in Vancouver, he was brought out as conductor and I was brought as violinist and we did the Korngold concerto.... It got him the job. "

Ehnes, 31, started playing the violin at age four. He came from a musical family — his father was a trumpet player and professor at Brandon University and his mother, a ballet dancer. "I pointed to a picture of the violin when I was really little and I somehow identified

the sound of the violin as something I really wanted," he said, emphasizing that he, not his parents, chose the instrument. Ehnes graduated from the Juilliard School in 1997 and was playing professionally even as a student.

Ehnes's manager discovered Glenn Gould

He got a big break when Walter Homburger — the same guy who discovered and managed Glenn Gould — came out of retirement to manage him. His violin has since placed him before many of the world's major orchestras, from London to Paris and Tokyo to Montreal.

But he rejects the trappings of stardom for a more unassuming style. "For me, music is very personal. I can't be something that I'm not," Ehnes said.

"I am in the entertainment industry and there is a certain amount of stuff goes into selling the product, but ultimately, what I've relied on is I've played the music the way I think it needs to be ... "In music, and particularly classical, I think that honesty as a performer is very important and if you don't have that, I think people can see it. That being said, there is so much room for variety in performance."

Ehnes now lives near Sarasota, Fla., with his ballet-dancer wife, close to spring training for his second love, baseball. The night before the Grammys, Ehnes will be in Spain, which may make it a bit of a stretch to attend the awards ceremony.

His two performances in Vancouver will be followed by a master class at the University of British Columbia with young musicians from the Vancouver area.