

# Violin concerto's world premiere in good hands of Toronto Symphony

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Operating, no doubt, on the premise that bad composers borrow while great composers steal, Lothar Klein has committed an act of grand theft in writing his Paganini Collage for Violin and Orchestra.

What's more, he admitted it candidly in the program notes for last night's world premiere performance at Massey Hall.

The theft involves a number of thematic fragments taken from the works (mostly Caprices) of 19th century violinist-composer Niccolò Paganini. Klein has strung them together to be played by a solo violin and added

orchestral comments of his own.

The practice is scarcely new. Composers from Bach to Berio have unashamedly robbed the cupboards of their colleagues in order to bake new musical cakes.

What makes Klein's felony fascinating is the fact that he allows the Paganini themes to retain their integrity, instead of transforming them as Stravinsky transformed Pergolesi's when writing Pulcinella.

The result, a juxtaposition of 19th century Paganini with 20th century Klein, turns out to be a concerto of opposing styles, a polyhistorical piece, as the composer himself describes it. A clever one, too.

Klein's rationale for prod-

ucing such a piece is to find parallel points of reference between old and new and to trace the flow of music's historical continuity—an understandable objective for someone who teaches in the University of Toronto's music faculty.

Fortunately, the piece doesn't suffer from any academic stodginess. In keeping with its thematic inspiration, its mood is bright and cheerfully virtuositic.

The scoring is also deft. Though the composer uses the resources of a full orchestra, he scores lightly, often involving the solo violin in exchanges with other solo instruments so that the effect resembles a conversation or even, at times, a battle of wits, rather than a

conventional solo plus accompaniment.

If the Paganini Collage suffers a major weakness it has to do with the lack of a strong sense of overall structure. Klein seems to be taking us on a 15 minute window shopping excursion with commentary, and as so often happens in such expeditions, the whole impresses us less than the sum of its parts.

The parts were, in any case, in good hands last night. Steven Staryk, who had earlier run through Bach's E Major Violin Concerto with all the confidence in the world, was perfectly cast to handle the virtuoso solo part, while Karel Ancerl conducted the Toronto Symphony with the care a premiere deserves.