

Off Centre Music goes over the top

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MUSIC CRITIC

Review

Define melodrama.

Your pondering might come up with "extravagantly theatrical play stressing action and plot over characterization."

A century and more ago, you would only be half-right, since melodrama was also a popular musical term with name composers, wherein music by piano or singers accompanied spoken voice.

Thus Glenn Gould Studio was the setting yesterday for a genuine contemporary rarity — actor Albert Schultz, Stratford vet and salty boss of Soulpepper Theatre Co., sedately intoning the tragic romantic stanzas of *The Castle By The Sea* to music by Richard Strauss played by pianist Inna Perkis.

Her playing heightened the mystic mood, though the ballad by Ludwig Uhlan hardly had the (dare one say melodramatic?) weight of Hamlet encountering his father's ghost.

There's always surprises in programming by Off Centre Music, in its fifth season and co-founded by Perkis and fellow-pianist Boris Zarankin. Advance publicity didn't mention a showboating opener by 12-year-old Alexander Seredenko, a Royal Con-

servatory student, who breezed with assurance through Chopin's *Scherzo* or a one piano, four hands if somewhat brittle take on a Rossini operatic overture.

It did, however, prepare fans for its persistent bid to recreate the salon music atmosphere of yesteryear with period set and cozy stage chat and, crucially, the Toronto recital debut of vivacious violist Atar Arad, the Israeli-born player of notorious verve and versatility.

With impeccably tasteful accompa-

niment from Zarankin, the singing tones and caressing continuity Arad brought to pieces by Schumann and Schubert's *Arpeggione* were unhurried but joyous as he moved through the shifting contours.

As a finale he chose one of legendary violinist Paganini's unusual pieces for viola — and even Arad admitted earlier that the "Sonata per la Gran-Viola" is a "show off" work. But he showed the audience his keen appreciation of the instrument's rarer sonic attributes, capturing the humour, ornate components and stern technical demands of the sometimes breathtaking concoction with fire, intelligence and grace.