



The Ottawa Citizen

Concert Review – Ottawa Bach Choir, Caroline Léonardelli, harp

Richard Todd, The Ottawa Citizen

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Harpist highlights exquisite concert

If nothing else had been outstanding in Wednesday evening's concert by the Ottawa Bach Choir, harpist Caroline Léonardelli and others would have been worth attending just to get acquainted with its charming venue.

Fourth Avenue Baptist Church at the corner of Bank and - ah but you've guessed - is a beautiful little space. From the moment you walk in you sense that the acoustics will be friendly on account of the compound pitch wooden ceiling, the general shape of the sanctuary and several other factors.

Harpist Léonardelli opened the program with Alphonse Hasselmans' Conte de Noël, a simple piece that has something of the pulse of a well-told folk tale. The acoustics were warm and immediate, virtually perfect for her instrument.

The female voices of the choir (there were no tenors or basses in the concert) were joined by the celebrated mezzo-soprano Julie Nesrallah in a solid rendition of Benjamin Britten's A Ceremony of Carols. Nesrallah held her rich and powerful voice back enough that it didn't overwhelm the acoustics as it easily could have.

Although their voices don't have Nesrallah's power, sopranos Kathleen Radke and Dayna Lamothe sang beautifully.

The choral work was good too. Articulation slipped just a little in a portion of Wolcum Yole and the pianissimi in A Dew in Aprile were more impressive than expressive, but these were small things.

It must be said, however, that the church's acoustics didn't work as well for voices, whether choral or solo, as they had for the harp.

The highlight of the performance was undoubtedly Léonardelli's achingly ethereal playing of the Interlude, the longest and possibly most perfect movement of Britten's ever-popular Ceremony. That movement was worth the price of admission by itself.

The second half of the program was given to mainly lighter fare. Nesrallah and Léonardelli began with three Spanish carols from Andalusia, Catalan and Puerto Rico. They were well sung and played, but nothing special in themselves.

Léonardelli then performed an arrangement of the American folk carol I Wonder as I Wander and two of the Six Noëls pour harpe. Léonardelli has been in the Ottawa music scene for many years but only began extensive concertising a few seasons ago. She's a real treasure.

The evening ended with Seven Joys of Christmas, a suite of seven carols from five countries arranged by Kirke Mechem, nice stuff and mostly unfamiliar.