

Congratulations to the Brockville Community Choir for bringing such an immensely varied program of music from around the world to a large and appreciative audience for the "Spring Serenade". Classical and contemporary, the rhythmic and the lyrical all happily rubbed shoulders together in a very satisfying performance.

The program began with a bang with the small bagpipes played by Larry Fitzpatrick and Highland dancers joining the choir. The Youth Choir performance was marked by wonderful tonal blend and excellent diction throughout. The music choices demanded great flexibility to go from the very lyrical opening "Over the Hills" to the energetic "Niska Banja" and back again to the warm, fuzzy feel of "Song for the Mira". The commitment to the music never wavered and the rapport between conductor and singers engaged the entire audience.

The listeners delighted in the performances by the graduating singers from the Choir: Abigael Schonewille, Bryony Schonewille, Elizabeth Munro, Kayleigh Kennedy and Gwendalyn Smith who sang beautifully in the "Song for the Mira".

Special mention must go to Emily Gardiner for her comedic turn in the solo song, "Alto's Lament", and in the duet "Papagena Papageno" with Corrine Schonewille. Both pieces were charming and entertaining.

The eight stalwart men of the Choir sang three unison pieces. The members of the octet distinguished themselves with a good blend and finely tuned phrasing. The basses deserve extra credit for reaching the high notes without showing the strain. I suspect the small number of men in the choir is a result of the lack of choral music in the elementary schools. Kudos to the few men who performed so well.

The much larger group of women of the Choir were given the task of performing French composer Francis Poulenc's Litanies, easily the most difficult work on the program. The choir very effectively delivered the inherent dramatic tension in the musical word painting for "pray now for us". Although the tonal shifts were not always secure, the marvelous dramatic mood changes were always clear.

Schubert's Standchen showed the versatility of some members of the ensemble when Heather the conductor became Heather the soloist. Her singing showed why the choir has such clarity of diction and sinuous tone. Accompanist Malcolm Gillis really distinguished himself in this work as well. Madelyn Piehl's very clear, quiet conducting ably supported the work of the two professionals.

I heard one of the audience members say the Mozart Nocturnes was her favourite work of the evening. With cross-pollination from the Brockville Concert Band in the guise of clarinetists Perri Howlett, Kati Rawson, and Lynn Bastien, the Choir was at its best in this classic work. Excellent dynamics combined with secure harmonies to underscore the essential musicality of Mozart's genius.

Oscar Peterson's rousing "Hymn to Freedom" not only concluded the program but caused a standing ovation.

I applaud Dr. Eyerly's decision to move away from the single large work concept to this very engaging collection of small but extremely varied works. The addition of dancers Evie Laushway, Joey Neild and Shannon O'Dair, fiddler Denise Bowes, the bagpipes and clarinets all contributed the audience's enjoyment. Dr. Eyerly's imaginative programming highlighted the choir's excellent tonal blend, precise diction, and command of dynamics which were so consistently on display throughout the evening.