

Georgian Music Review – Hilary Apfelstadt conducts the Glorious Voices of the Exultate Chamber Singers – Sunday February 11th, 2018 - 2:30 p.m.



Submitted by Catherine Waffle

Exultate Chamber Singers

The third of four offerings in the Georgian Music concert series occurred on Sunday, February 11th. The concert featured the Toronto-based Exultate Chamber Singers under the direction of Hilary Apfelstadt. This delightful two-hour program made the audience glad that they, and the choir, had braved the unpleasant February weather in order to attend.

The Exultate Chamber Singers is composed of 33 members representing a variety of professional backgrounds. All singers are talented and highly capable musicians. This was immediately apparent when one noticed that they did not form the usual arrangement of singers in a choir. Instead of being grouped in sections according to their vocal ranges of soprano, alto, tenor and bass, this choir stood in mixed groupings. This requires competence and surety when performing as singers are not supported by a section singing the same parts. The arrangement does, however, enable a depth of sound and density that can't always be achieved in SATB groupings. This was immediately showcased in the first several pieces.

The first half of the concert focussed on sacred works. *Hodie* by the Canadian composer, Nancy Telfer, was energetic and featured the bright, clear voices of the sopranos. It was sung without piano accompaniment. Two contrasting settings of the *Ave Verum Corpus* followed; one by Mozart and the other by Byrd (classical and renaissance periods). The choir achieved a richness of tone in both pieces. They demonstrated their responsive connection to the conductor in the dynamic ranges achieved and in the beautifully tapered phrase-endings. Two selections from Mendelssohn's *Elijah* featured a trio of sopranos and alto in *Lift Thine Eyes*. The women's voices were perfectly balanced and blended in this unaccompanied piece. The dynamic power of the full choir made for a dramatic performance of *He Watching Over Israel*. The piece that concluded the sacred works – Faure's *Cantique de Jean Racine* – provided a truly solemn moment. From the opening bars sung by tenors and basses to the lush phrasing so typical of this French style, the choir captured and conveyed the essence of this music. The hushed, serene ending moved the audience.

The second half of the performance showcased the choir's commitment to Canadian music. An eclectic selection of pieces by 20th century composers including Harry Somers, Stephen Chatman, Donald Patriquin and Ruth Watson Henderson were enthusiastically performed. This repertoire highlighted the multiple talents of the choir; their ability to handle rhythmically-driven works, irregular phrasing, articulation, sustained, blended sound and dramatic, energetic focus. A wonderful moment was achieved under the baton of the incoming conductor (as Ms. Apfelstadt retires later this year). Mark Ramsey led the choir through Stephen Chatman's *Chickadee* - a rousing performance that brought the choir to a level of excitement and energy appreciated by all.