
Cantata Singers mark 50th anniversary in fine style

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Special to The Citizen

The Prince George Cantata Singers delivered their 50th anniversary celebratory concert last Sunday to a sold-out audience at the Prince George Playhouse. And what a masterful performance it was.

Full disclosure, I approached the event with some trepidation, a bit worried that I was about to spend my Sunday evening listening to some showtunes and toe-tapping oldies. But instead, we were treated to a program that was meaningful, thoughtful, provocative and challenging, full of rich and complex arrangements of unique choral repertoire, all professionally performed with great love and pride.

As soon as the choristers arrived on stage, I was immediately struck by the wonderfully coordinated gold-coloured accoutrements and stage décor and knew right away that this was going to be a production that resulted from some very thoughtful and precise planning.

Although, to be honest, I don't think I would ever expect anything less than that from Evelyn Lee, the organization's highly-skilled president, and all-around community organizer and supporter.

I could also perceive a unique excitement and enthusiasm amongst the audience members, and later in the program when

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prior choir members were asked to stand, the evidence was clear that this vital local arts organization has deep, deep roots in the community – having provided musical and performance opportunities to multiple generations, often within the same families.

Both interim music director Neil Wolfe and accompanist Maureen Nielsen were stellar throughout.

Wolfe's musical insight is very impressive and his work in preparing the ensemble to deliver such a nuanced and moving performance was first-rate. And Nielsen's work at the keyboard was truly remarkable, knowing when to be in a supportive role and when to take

a lead. Her interpretations were flawless throughout this very demanding program of over twenty selections. Bravo to both and a hearty congratulations to Nielsen for her 35 consecutive seasons of musical service to the organization.

Two personal favourites from the program where John Rutter's *For the Beauty of the Earth* and *Seal Lullaby* by Eric Whitacre – providing such hauntingly beautiful harmonies and arrangements that I was stirred to near tears in both pieces.

Having the youth singers of the District 57 Tapestry Singers was a beautiful touch as well, emphasizing the universality of vocal and choral music – spanning time, generations, cultures and styles. I loved the interpretation of *By the Rivers of Babylon*.

My personal experience with Psalm 137 is in Hebrew as it comprises the Jewish weekday grace after meals and I very much enjoyed hearing this touching and moving English-language interpretation.

Congratulations to everyone involved with this once-in-a-lifetime performance. The Prince George community should feel honoured to have access to such a sustainably successful, community cultural organization.

Best wishes for another 50 years of celebrating our communal love for the human voice.

Printed May 4, 2019 in the Prince George Citizen on p.2