

# Choral work In Canadian Woods highlight of Luminous Voices performance



*KENNETH DELONG, CALGARY HERALD*

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Luminous Voices. *CALGARY HERALD*

The music group of my church has a piece it likes to sing. It is called: *We Are Pilgrims on a Journey*. And it was the metaphor of travel, of a journey, that formed the unifying thread linking the individual items that comprised the wonderfully rich, satisfying concert presented by Luminous Voices at the Bella Concert Hall on Sunday afternoon.

Using this image, conductor Timothy Shantz put together a fascinating compendium of mostly contemporary choral music — music that needs the rich texture of excellent voices to give it speech. And this it found in the nuanced, sumptuous sounds produced by Luminous Voices in one of their most completely satisfying programs to date.

The special element for this particular concert came in the form of a first performance of a work called *In Canadian Woods* by one-time Calgary composer Heather Schmidt. Based on words by Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill, sisters who chronicled their impressions of pioneer life in Canada, the roughly 10-minute cantata-like work painted the emotions of the text in vivid musical ideas that were-suited for choral performance. Filled with contrasting feelings and themes, the work builds to a high point, before its quiet conclusion.

Schmidt's musical idiom is naturally modern, but within the parameters of harmonies and melodies that are grateful for singing, and exploit the various vocal combinations possible. Complete with an expressive piano part, played by Schmidt herself, the work made a strong impression and was well received. A commission by Irene Kyle in memory of her parents, *In Canadian Woods* should quickly enter the growing repertoire of excellent Canadian compositions.

The opening of the concert was devoted to three works, *Come to the Road* by Zachary Wadsworth, former a resident of Calgary, and two transcriptions, the first of Mahler's familiar (and beautiful) song *I bin der Welt abhanden gekommen*, and the second a vocal transcription of Debussy *Des pas sur la neige*. Both were virtual re-compositions for choral forces and included much original thought in terms of choral texture. Very unusual as works, they were both a treat to hear in such exquisite performance, which included the fine, imaginative piece by Wadsworth.

A cleanly sung, rhythmically wellspring account of J.S. Bach's little-sung motet *Furchte dich nicht* completed the first half. The music on the second was, if anything more dramatic, especially the extended excerpt *Santiago* from Joby Talbot's *Path of Miracles*. With much vocal drama, including passages in the style of Medieval music, the work traces the emotions of pilgrims on the famous journey to Spain's Santagio de Compostella, a journey pilgrims have been making for centuries.

The quieter side of the emotional spectrum came in the three settings by Frank Ticheli of three poems of Sara Teasdale entitled *Constellation* and the marvellously evocating piece *The Road Home* by Stephen Paulus — my favourite work on the program. Touching on more familiar repertoire, the concert included a passionate rendition of Paul Simon's always affecting *Bridge Over Troubled Water* and the familiar middle movement from Brahms's *German Requiem*.

Throughout the concert, the choir sang with great precision and superb vocal tone, including a number of brief solo spots from members of the choir. As choral singing, it is difficult to imagine anything more musically and vocally accomplished, each section of the group (of 24 singers on this occasion) beautifully blended and eloquent.

Going from strength to strength, Luminous Loices presented a wonderful concert: rich in the music itself, and equally rich in the musical and technical accomplishment displayed in the singing.