

Review - BC Boys Choir

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Precision. In various aspects of life, it is either absolutely necessary or not required, and there exists a vast grey area of variation in between those poles. In the performance of music, one must maintain a very tricky balance between absolute precision (boring, robotic) and excessive sloppiness (distracting and unpleasant). The Christmas concert by the British Columbia Boys Choir on Monday night displayed some fine examples of perfect balance, and unfortunately some moments of imprecision. In existence for over 45 years, the choir has members ranging from boy soprano as young as 7, to baritone voices as old as 20, and the current director, Tony Araujo, with a relaxed and humorous preamble, made clear his passion and enthusiasm for developing these young voices.

The show started well, the attention of the audience being immediately drawn to the procession of tenors and baritones, all dressed impeccably and singing as they walked on stage. The opening piece, Noel Noel, warmed up the audience to the sound of an all boys choir and displayed some nice harmony work. It's a unique sound and nice to hear as most choirs have a far greater number of girls singing than boys.

The departure of the lower voices heralded the arrival of the younger boys, altos and sopranos. Dressed to match the older boys, they definitely struck a chord with the audience, judging by the reactions and utterances of "so cute"! I was impressed by their first piece, a challenging Mozart work titled "Laudamus Te". As a vocalist, actor and having directed choirs myself, one particular aspect I really appreciated from all the boys was clear and precise diction, consistently throughout the evening. In a time when trying to understand and fight the sad degradation of my own language is a challenge, listening to young people singing with clarity in English and Latin is a pleasure. Even with the full choir on stage, the words were clear, and director Tony managed to create excellent dynamics and expression, with nice clean cutoffs. Special note must be made of the 2 opening pieces in the second half, both of which were exquisitely performed and arranged. Also, the first soloist (who also doubled on the djembe but whose name I unfortunately could not find) from Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer had a wonderful voice and is definitely a young man to watch for in the future.

The program did change significantly from the original plan, with the addition of baritone and BC Boys Choir alumnus Jason Cook. I will be straightforward here and say that, in my opinion, his presence did not enhance the evening and distracted from the choir as a whole. Mr. Cook is now a trained opera singer, and while I can respect his desire to pay homage to the choir in which he found his start, I feel that too much of the program was dedicated just to his voice, and many valuable opportunities to integrate the choir were missed. (Though perhaps that was because of the last minute change.)

Now, with regards to precision...perhaps because of the layout of the stage and location of the piano, there were moments of hesitation and tuning issues that I found distracting. With young boys who are still learning control over their voices, I can give a lot of leeway. With someone who has considerable training and aspires to a professional career, I cannot. Enough said.

Overall, the choir achieved what was intended. It was a pleasant Christmas concert, for an appreciative audience (though there were a few grumbles when Mr. Araujo accidentally thanked Kamloops...) and the sing along section was nice touch! Hopefully this first Christmas concert for the KCCA starts a tradition in Kelowna that lasts for many years to come.

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