

## Review - The Elmer Iseler Singers

The human voice is a remarkable thing. The range of sounds and pitch and volume it can produce is mind boggling, and surprisingly, it is only quite recently that medical science has finally started to understand how it really works. And while we are not the only animal that sings, there is a unique magic when humans sing together.

In the world of formal choral singing, few groups have achieved the status of the Elmer Iseler singers. The multi-award winning choir, formerly under the direction of Elmer Iseler O.C., and now Lydia Adams, performed a concert which clearly showed why they have earned the countless accolades since being formed in 1979. There was a technical perfection to their sound which was always impressive and at times truly inspiring. With a music selection that leaned heavily on Canadian composers, there was a wide range of sound for the audience, from beautiful melodies and spirituals (*Amazing Grace* is always a crowd pleaser), to the abstract such as Nur:Reflections on Light (a piece created around only one word to sing), and even a Rita MacNeil song, *She's Called Nova Scotia*, sung so beautifully by soloist Gisele Kulak. In every instance, the choir was perfectly balanced in sound, supporting when needed, then forming a powerful unified sound the next instant. (For those in the audience who have experience singing, the control over sound and dynamics was beyond impressive). While a great deal of the night was acapella, when the piano did come in and out, the choir's pitch never shifted, with a particularly fine example of some chromatic movement at the end of the first half, done in full harmony. I must make mention of the accompaniment, as it was masterfully done by Shawn Grenke. Playing on the theatre's "new" piano, he never stepped outside his role of accompanist and his playing was impeccable.

If there is to be a criticism of this performance, it would for me be the selection of music. A lot of the feel and emotion and style was very similar, and while very interesting to choral fans, may have been a bit slow for some listeners. That having been said, there were many moments the theatre could not have been more still if empty, the audience was so entranced by this choir.

This was the final regular performance of this season for KCCA and it wraps up a truly wonderful and diverse concert series. It's easy to see why there's a waiting list for memberships and kudos to Betty Skilbeck, the board and all the volunteers for making it happen. Next season looks to be just as diverse and entertaining.

Thanks to the Elmer Iseler Singers for wrapping up the season with a beautiful, inspiring and even patriotic performance. In a city filled with choirs, they certainly showed us just how magical voices can be.

Neville Bowman - musician, composer