

## Barrie Concert – October 27th, 2018 Craig Pike conducts the amazing “That Choir”



submitted by Alyssa Wright

Alyssa Wright is a cellist, singer-songwriter, music educator and writer

The 2018/19 season of Barrie Concerts began on a – dare I say it? – high note last weekend with That Choir. Led by conductor and artistic director Craig Pike, the fifteen members of this Toronto-based a cappella choir delighted a packed Hiway Pentecostal with an eclectic program that showcased both their high-calibre choral work and their joy of singing in ensemble.

The concert opened with the haunting “Stars” by Eriks Esenvalds. Rich dissonances and close harmonies, combined with humming and vocables (all of which can make finding the precise pitches tricky in a room you’re not yet familiar with) made this a rather daring opener – but the choir lived up to that dare wonderfully. My only complaint was that it was difficult to make out Sara Teasdale’s beautiful lyrics, although this was the only work in which I had that issue, leaving me to wonder if the lack of clarity was due to the arrangement, rather than issues with choral diction.

After the applause faded, Pike turned to the audience with a twinkle in his eye and a “Hello, how’s it going? Thanks for coming by!” – a fun and welcoming demeanour that showcased the friendliness of his Newfoundlander roots and the flair of his theatrical background. You could see the choir share his enthusiasm as they danced in place through such pieces as Rosephanye Powell’s “The Word Was God” or Kathleen Allan’s arrangement of “Come and I will Sing You”, play through the swing of some of the more jazz and gospel-style pieces, yet also turn that passion inwards for the focused beauty of Bruckner’s “Locus Iste” and “Os Justi” (leaving me breathless).

Obviously very community-minded, Pike invited the audience to sing along in “Abide with Me”, handed over “introduction duties” in the second half of the program to a couple of choir members, and took a bit of a break while “the ladies” did “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy” (a fun arrangement, although I wish they’d sung it without scores, as the performance lost a bit of freedom with noses buried in folders). He even gave up his baton to a young audience member –

eight-year-old Owen – who received a quick conducting lesson, got to lead the choir through a few verses, and is now probably hooked on choral music for life. (Well played, sir, well played...)

A rollicking finale of “Ezekiel Saw De Wheel” was greeted with a well-deserved standing ovation for such a splendid and entertaining evening of music, granting us one last chance to hear the choir, in a lovely encore of “Danny Boy”. This was a return visit to Barrie for That Choir – let’s hope they come again soon!