**Ottawa Brahms Choir 35th Anniversary Christmas Concert 2015**

**‘Shepherds’ Christmas’ - Impressions**

***“Music is probably the most beautiful form of communication between peoples of different backgrounds and traditions. Music unites, music transcends borders, bringing people closer to one another. Choral music especially is not only a pleasure for the audience but also for the singers. I am therefore pleased that the Ottawa Brahms Choir has been bringing people together with singing for over 35 years……”*** (from ‘A Message from our Honorary Patron His Excellency Werner Wnendt, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany’. Full text printed in our Spring and Christmas programmes 2015).

In this spirit The Ottawa Brahms Choir under the direction of Christopher Askwith and new accompanist Svetlana Logigan together with pleasing instrumentalists and soloists presented its Shepherds’ Christmas concert on Sunday afternoon, November 29, 2015, before a full audience that included his Excellency, the German Ambassador Werner Wnendt and his wife, Dr. Eleonore Wnendt-Juber.

St. Thomas the Apostle church was festively decorated to mark the beginning of the Christmas season.

To begin, choir and audience sang together the well-known first carol ‘*While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks By Night’* .

Our President, Leo Heistek, warmly greeted the audience and particularly our guests of honour, inviting everyone to a reception downstairs at the end of the concert.

The choir, soloists, and instrumentalists under the direction of Christopher Askwith presented for the first time Hammerschmidt’s ‘*Ihr Lieben Hirten, Fuerchtet Euch Nicht’*. Soloists Zoë Langlois (soprano) with a lovely major solo part, Tammy Hoyle-Shaw (alto), Richard Langlois (tenor) and Andrew Day (bass) sang their parts beautifully. The choir joined with heart singing *Freude, Freude, Grosse Freude….!. (joy, joy, great joy!).* All vocalists were accompanied by Svetlana Logigan at the piano, Isabelle Tooker on oboe, Peter Gemmell on clarinet, Viktoria Grynenko on violin, Jenna Richards on violin, Onyou Lee on viola, and Alexis Castrogiovanni on violoncello. The audience responded to this work with appreciative applause.

A selection of soprano recitatives from Handel’s *Messiah*, presented with angelic voice by Zoë Langlois, choir, and accompanying instrumentalists, was well received.

The beautiful choral work *L’Adieu Des Bergers* (Hector Berlioz), in which Zoë Langlois sang solo verses, concluded the first half of the programme.

Choir member Elisabeth Salm, as a member of Ecology Ottawa, presented the audience with a statement about the march in Ottawa to support the climate change conference in Paris.

The music program continued with a very special piano recital. Svetlana presented with grace, vitality and expertise Peter I. Tchaikovsky’s Nutcracker Suite ‘*Andante, Maestoso’*, a transcription by M. V Pletnev. The audience and concert participants loved it and gave a thunderous applause. Many thanks, Svetlana.

The choir returned to sing traditional French carols ‘*D’Ou Viens Tu Bergère’* and ‘*Les Anges Dans Nos Campagnes’*, to which the audience was invited to sing along. The choir sang in German ‘*Kommet Ihr Hirten*’, with an arrangement by Christopher Askwith, and ‘*Wiegenlied der Hirten’* a folksong from Glatz region and an arrangement by Max Bruch. A challenge for the choir was a specially beautiful Christmas carol in the Mohawk language, arranged by Mathew Larkin, ‘*Rotonni Niio Roienha’* . The audience received all with warm enthusiastic applause.

The concert program continued with four well known carols, ‘*Shepherds’ Nowell’* , ‘*Do You Hear What I Hear*’, ‘*In The Bleak Midwinter’*, and carol ‘*See Amid the Winter’s Snow’*, with lively audience participation. Soprano Zoë Langlois sang the first verse of the last two carols with fine voice and continued to sing along. A long enthusiastic applause, followed by flower presentations concluded a successful concert programme.

At the reception downstairs the guests were greeted by beautifully decorated tables laid out with refreshments, Christmas baked goods, savories and lovely flower arrangements.

An elating, warm atmosphere prevailed at the reception. Complimentary remarks were expressed by the guests. Leo, the choir’s president, as usual standing on a chair, gave hearty kudos to all in the room with a special thanks to our special guests - who had come out to join our celebration of 35 years of singing.

The choir and conductor wish to express thanks to the soloists and musicians, to our Patron, the German Ambassador Werner Wnendt, and his wife, Dr. Eleonore Wnendt-Juber, for their presence at the concert, and his Message to the choir, as well as to the supportive audience, to all volunteers for giving their time and assistance, the media for publishing our announcements, and the many sponsors for their financial support, in making this concert again a happy successful event. (G.H.)