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## [Report from Prince George: "Winter Dreams" a Dream Concert](#)

Posted on 19 March 2014. Tags: [Bel Canto Children's Chorus](#), [Kevin Zakresky](#), [Marnie Hamagami](#), [Melaine Nichol](#), [Prince George Symphony](#)



Orchestra News, as careful readers know, is primarily inspired by media releases about upcoming orchestral events from across Canada. We study what comes in, we consider what might be most interesting to our readership, we edit ruthlessly, and we publish. We rarely get to learn what has gone on behind the scenes; nor do we get post-event reports. Last week, however, we were delighted to get just such a report from **Marnie Hamagami**, General Manager of the

**Prince George Symphony**, about one of their recent concerts. It's a good story, and we recommend it highly to you!

Although things Russian have been in the news lately for the wrong reasons, a celebration of Russian music at the **Prince George Symphony** was one of the season's highlights. An all-Russian program gave British Columbia's northern orchestra a chance to play Tchaikovsky's *Fourth Symphony* as well as introduce the local audience to Russian operatic excerpts, and even Prokofiev's "klezmer à la Russe" *Overture on Hebrew Themes*.

The concert, given March 8 at Vanier Hall was a box office as well as an artistic success. But as PGSO manager **Marnie Hamagami** explains, it was a question of calculated risks. "The PGSO reality is unique and just a bit complicated. Here we are, an eight-hour plus drive to the closest big centres – Edmonton and Vancouver – and through much of our season weather adds to our isolation. On the other hand, some audience members and musicians happily drive three hours plus to attend performances. Distance is just different here. Prince George is the hub city for central and northern BC, so when we do something big, it's extra important."

Understanding the local turf matters for any orchestra, but in an environment like Prince George, Hamagami has found you can't always rely on conventional ways of doing things. "We often use a Vancouver based publicist to help with our copy and advertising. When I got a proposed blurb for "Winter Dreams" that started with 'Now that winter is almost over,' I said to myself 'Wait a second! It's minus 35 and there are two meters of snow outside!' We have had to find ways of recognizing our unique situations, and making things work with an understanding of who we are and who we perform for."

"We work with a small professional core, community musicians, and a certain number of imports who we fly in from down south. Doing a work like the Tchaikovsky Fourth is very expensive, so we have to strategize through a whole season to be able to mount it in an artistically satisfying way that is still cost-effective."

One of the PGSO strategies was to augment rehearsal time. "Our conductor, **Kevin Zakresky**, decided to free up a good chunk of time by programming the Prokofiev, which is a chamber work for six performers, and playing the piano part himself." The extra time carved out for the Tchaikovsky repaid results. Another strategy was to showcase local mezzo **Melaine Nichol** and the **Bel Canto Children's Chorus** (who ended the first half of the concert with the popular folk song *Kalinka*). "Mel has a significant following in Prince George, and it was wonderful to give the kids in the choir the thrill of performing with a professional orchestra."

"In the event, Winter Dreams played for an enthusiastic and near sell-out house. It may have cost a bit more than we might have ideally liked, but it won us accolades from our regular subscribers and introduced scores of new audience members to the thrill of big Romantic repertoire."

Editor's note: Thank you, Marnie! If your orchestra would like to share your story with colleagues across the country, let us know. [Information about Orchestra News and our editorial policy is posted here.](#)

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