

THE PRINCE GEORGE CITIZEN

PGSO celebrates unique music of Russia

[Valerie Giles](#) / Prince George Citizen

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In the rhythm of the year at this latitude, with spring's arrival still far off, we're a city still able to enjoy winter dreams in March!

This concert celebrated the unique music of our circumpolar neighbour, Russia, and the famous 19th century composers that country produced.

The program opened with Sergei Prokofiev's "Overture on Hebrew Themes" which the composer wrote in 1920 with the intent that it be performed by a sextet. The PGSO played it with that configuration rather than the chamber orchestra version Prokofiev later composed. The audience heard the compelling music beautifully played by Simon Cole on clarinet, Jose Delgado-Guevara on first violin, Anne Harris on second violin, Veronica Lee on viola, Joe Goering on cello and music director Kevin Zakresky on piano. The interesting changes of mood were reminiscent of the music written for Fiddler on the Roof - the musical set in Tsarist Russia.

In introducing Mikhail Glinka's "Ratmir's Aria," Dr. Zakresky raised expectations for the audience by describing mezzo-soprano Melanie Nicol's voice as compelling, particularly for her range. He made sure that the audience was aware that she would perform "a top C sharp which is difficult to sustain" - and she did! The aria featured was from Glinka's second Russian opera. She performed it mostly in the lower register as that role was meant for a male voice--but she effortlessly delivered it.

Nicol then moved on to the second aria, "Ah, Tanya, Tanya" which is Olga's aria from Eugene Onegin. This allowed her to use her remarkable range in a melancholy piece which included that long note.

Serge Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise" was composed as "a song without words" which allows performers like Nicol to work with a vowel sound throughout the notes.

With considerable enthusiasm, Dr. Zakresky introduced the traditional Russian folk song, "Kalinka" performed by Nicol on the solo parts and the Bel Canto Children's Choir providing the rhythms in the chorus. The audience supported the presentation by offering rhythmic applause right through to the exuberant cheer at the end. That was impressive appreciation for a song which is an ode to a cranberry!

Following intermission, Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 in F Minor was performed in four movements. The Andante showcased the bassoon, trumpet and woodwind instruments all the while managing to create the sensation of warning, as if expecting a tempest. After beginning with that feeling of urgency, the music worked into gentle, sweet playing with notes from the brasses floating over the strings. During the Andantino, the strong and sad oboe commanded attention with hauntingly beautiful sound. By the third movement, the tempo quickened like prancing cat feet quietly scurrying across the stage. The orchestra created a round of sound featuring only the strings, woodwinds and brasses. Pizzicato playing (plucking the strings instead of using the bow) makes for an intriguing effect. At the Finale, more volume was employed producing more intense emotion. It is believed that this work was created when the composer had a great deal

of emotional turmoil in his life. Admittedly, the sound is intense, and it is well known that this music was not well received when first introduced. Its clashing sounds were actually considered "barbaric" but now evoke excitement in contemporary audiences.

The concert closed with Dr. Zakresky acknowledging his orchestra members and, especially, concertmaster Jose Delgado-Guevara. They all heard very enthusiastic response from the audience.

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