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[Zakresky Brings Eloquence and Authority to Choral Concert](#)

February 5, 2012. 8:59 am • Section: [STAFF](#)



by David Gordon Duke

A decidedly out-of-the-ordinary choral concert took place at St Andrew's-Wesley Saturday evening: a program featuring major works by Britten and Cherubini and sung by two separate vocal ensembles, **EnChor** and **Chor Leoni Men's Choir**. The occasion was the doctoral recital of Yale DMA candidate **Kevin Zakresky**.

The usual practice for such events is to string together a nice assortment of pieces in different styles and idioms. Saturday's program was a more risky proposition, including Benjamin Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb* and Luigi Cherubini's D minor *Requiem*, both important pieces with plenty of challenges for any conductor.

A bow in the direction of Generation Y's thrall with technology started the evening: video program notes set up the recital with cheeky informality. A joyous snippet of the Italian Baroque followed, Viadana's popular psalm setting *Exultate Justi*, emphatically rendered by EnChor.

Rejoice in the Lamb was a work EnChor's singers could get their teeth into, and they visibly savoured the opportunity to present this quirky masterwork of the modern choral repertoire. It also provided a splendid showcase for organist **Michael Murray**; his work was particularly tasteful, with arresting colours and a subtle measure of whimsy. Zakresky drew a very nuanced and secure performance from his forces but didn't shy away from Britten's inherent operatic theatricality. It was a minor revelation to hear the work sung as

Britten would have expected, from the church’s choir stalls rather than concert-style risers.

After an orchestral palate cleanser in the form of Fauré’s lush, sophisticated *Pavan*, it was on to Cherubini. Designed in advance for his own funeral, his *Requiem* is well schooled and ultra-professional; however, for all its classical virtues, it is a work of intriguing individuality. There are considerable conducting challenges in keeping this symphony-length work on track and eloquently paced, which were more than successfully negotiated. As with Britten, it is easy to hear Cherubini the opera composer in the dramatic thrust of the *Dies irae* and the grand opulence of the *Sanctus*.

Zakresky demonstrated that he is a young conductor of sensitive musicality. His gestural vocabulary avoids extravagance while exuding take-charge authority. Unusually for a choral specialist, he appears equally comfortable with singers and with instrumentalists; his genial confidence was reflected back by the musicians. One must leave an academic assessment of his work to his university mentors (brought to Vancouver for the event); but if you polled the two large ensembles of singers, the professional orchestra, and the full-house audience, I’m sure they’d call this an impressive evening of fine music and fine music making.

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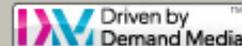
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To watch Mr. Zakresky's "cheeky" introduction to Saturday's performance go to

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jos62OrOuKM>

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