

Passion for the arts alive and well in North Bay - LETTER

Updated 2 hours ago

I am still hearing voices.

On Saturday, in the beautiful restored chamber of St. Andrew's United Church, we enjoyed a brilliant fusion of film, voice and music as the Near North Voices, in partnership with the North Bay Symphony presented the Northern Ontario premiere of "Voices of Light/The Passion of Joan of Arc".

As Artistic Director, Adam Adler followed the tradition of the grand silent movies; each phrase and downbeat was a direct and physical response to the film that followed the arc of Joan's trial, flickering in sharp, perfect black-and-white behind the singers and musicians. The 1928 film by director Carl Dreyer, "The Passion of Joan of Arc" carried both French and English subtitles, but the intense silent actors made words almost unnecessary. The emotion in each bar of the music and libretto by the American composer, Richard Einhorn was a perfect match to each frame of the film; we were all swept up in the passion of Jeanne d'Arc for that magical hour and a half. The power and emotion of the music transcended language with a libretto built from transcripts of the trials of Joan of Arc, bible passages and medieval poetry, and the writings of a number of female medieval mystics in both Latin and Medieval French.

Near North Voices is Nipissing University's Community Choir; members include students, staff and faculty from Nipissing University and Canadore College, as well as singers from the community. With the North Bay Symphony Orchestra, together they created a powerful extended musical work. Singers and musicians from Sudbury, Renfrew, Burk's Falls, Callander, Toronto, Hamilton and Windsor joined our community for the special event; although the group had only a few rehearsals together, the music and Dr. Adler's inspiring work as Musical Director created an experience that was unforgettable.

Jeanne d'Arc was only nineteen when she was tried, tortured and burned at the stake by an English Ecclesiastical Court. She changed the course of history, bringing a renewed hope to the French nation during the Hundred Years' war. Yet, it took over twenty years for the King of France to ask the Pope to reverse the findings of that court. It took 400 more years for her to become canonized in 1920--- a mere nine years before Carl Dreyer's silent film was made! It is tempting to be indignant, angry or saddened by Joan's sufferings; but the presentation we saw on Saturday inspires us to say, every day, that we will, and must challenge injustice and abuse of power because it harms all humankind.

I was especially inspired by the energy, enterprise and creativity of the faculty members who made this all come together, especially Gillian McCann and Artistic Director, Adam Adler. The Voices of Light project engaged faculty in a series of discussions, exhibitions, and presentations, culminating in this outstanding production. It was a wonderful celebration of the connection between scholarship, creativity and community that celebrates the true meaning of the teacher/scholar set in the context of our community and culture.

Lesley Lovett-Doust

President and Vice-Chancellor

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