



April, 2010

For immediate release

Ottawa's 100-voice symphonic chorus and the city's largest symphony orchestra amass their forces in Southam Hall on Monday, May 17th at 8:00 pm to present EPIC & ANTIC! the final concert on the 2009-10 season of both groups.

Two contemporary composers, Rodion Shchedrin and the late Canadian composer Harry Somers open the program with the unholy laughter of *Naughty Limericks* (Concerto No 1) and *Three Limericks*, followed after the intermission, by Sergei Prokofiev's epic cantata *Alexander Nevsky*.

Ottawa, Canada: Throughout its 2009-10 season, the Ottawa Symphony Orchestra (OSO) has been sampling 'first concertos'. On **Monday, May 17th**, the orchestra ends its series of 'great firsts' with something delightfully different. At barely 8 minutes long Shchedrin's *Concerto No.1* draws on the Russian *chastushka*, an irreverent, satirical folksong noted for its brevity and humour. True to its form, Shchedrin's *Naughty Limericks* is a musical jest – a playful virtuosic showpiece, whose droll cadenzas and bewildering pauses make the listener wary of what's coming next!

Keeping with the limerick theme, Maestro Currie passes the baton to Ottawa Choral Society (OCS) Music Director Mathew Larkin who is making his debut on the podium of the Ottawa Symphony Orchestra this evening. Grand Prize 2006 OCS New Discoveries Winner, soprano Michèle Bogdanowicz, joins Larkin, the choir, and a chamber orchestra of blistering brass, winds and percussion for *Three Limericks*, a rollicking song cycle by Harry Somers, composed in 1979 to celebrate the centenary of his great friend Healey Willan. Willan, tutor to a generation of Canada's most prominent composers and Precentor at Toronto's Church of St. Mary Magdalene for more than half-a-century, arguably out-composed anyone on the planet for sublime and glorious liturgical music. What few would know is that the twinkle in his eye most likely was sparked by his love of a witty verse. What more fitting homage than to set to music the clever couplets of the older man's favourite *limerickist* W. H. Auden? Somers's *Three Limericks* is a virtuosic, polyrhythmic, mad romp that would be at home in the cabarets of Kurt Weil's Berlin. Not for the faint of heart, these ribald verses may cause the daintiest concertgoers to blush!

Soloist and chorus remain with the orchestra as Prokofiev's gripping cantata, *Alexander Nevsky*, eclipses the earlier mood with its harrowing account of a climatic episode in Russia's mediaeval history. The music began its life in 1938 as the film score for iconic Russian filmmaker Eisenstein's masterpiece *Alexander Nevsky*. While the film is now relegated to a dusty archive, Prokofiev's score has found a life of its own on the concert stage. An epic cantata in seven movements, it is the story of the legendary 13th-century knight Prince Alexander Nevsky who led his army of Russian peasants to victory over the marauding Teutonic hords in a grueling battle on the ice of the River Neva. The unfolding drama sears the nerves as the music depicts in thrilling choral symphonic colours, the menacing barbarian invasion, the valiant battle of the peasants on the frozen barrens, the haunting pathos of a desolate mother on the Field of the Dead, and a *tour de force* finale

extolling their victorious Prince and the beloved homeland as exultant bells toll above the great city of Novgorod.

The 100-voice Ottawa Choral Society (OCS) appears regularly with both the Ottawa Symphony Orchestra and the National Arts Centre Orchestra, as well as offering its own annual subscription series. OCS conductor Mathew Larkin is well known not only as a choral conductor, but also as an organ recitalist and composer, having performed throughout North America, the UK and Europe. Michèle Bogdanowicz, one of Canada's leading young sopranos, has been praised by reviewers as having a "beautifully expressive voice, an ebullient stage personality" with an "unprecedented warmth and beauty". Ms. Bogdanowicz dazzled Ottawa concertgoers in the music of Aaron Copland and Samuel Barber with the OCS in the choir's 2008 *Notes from America*.

The National Capital Region's largest orchestra, the OSO presents five concerts each year at the National Arts Centre, under Music Director and Conductor David Currie.

Tickets:

OSO Box Office (613-231-2561)

NAC and Ticketmaster

Regular: \$22 to \$65

Seniors: \$20 to \$59

Students: \$11 to \$32.50