

CRIMSON STAIN

The premiere of Larry Nickel's, *Crimson Stain*, was a huge success and a deeply moving experience. It was one of those rare occasions where the audience seemed to be part of the music. Larry's achingly beautiful harmonies and melodic sweep truly drew us into the story. This is a composer whose music is a deep and passionate expression of his faith. "Remembrance" music appropriate for the 100th anniversary of the battle of attrition could end up being very dark and intense, but Larry's music doesn't go there, at least not very often, he is able to smile at death, in fact one of the movements is a lot of fun, it's a Vietnamese folk tale all about a cat and a snake! The journey that we are taken on in *Crimson Stain* concludes magnificently with a movement titled *Crossing Over*. It's wonderful to hear well crafted music that is truly written from the heart. Larry's musical language is very personal, hymn like at times and there is also a very natural use of jazz harmony, beautifully voiced chords, not unlike those of the American jazz guitarist and composer Pat Metheny. The piano and cello parts are very rich and rather romantic, but never too heavy or indulgent and the gorgeous themes are passed back and forth skillfully and elegantly. The vocal solos add so much to the personal nature of the work and are well balanced. The tenor solos were particularly effective and an interesting connection to the cello lines throughout the work. The choral writing is so natural, you can tell that Larry has been a professional chorister and conductor for many years. The poetic texts, most of them by Larry Smeets were certainly well served and were very clear. One of the highlights was a text of Wilfred Owen, *Move Him Into the Sun*. There is an incredible shimmer, a heavenly light created with Larry's warm and holy harmonies. This is truly a great work and an important addition to the canon of Canadian choral music, a masterpiece which deserves to be heard and I have the feeling it will be with us for many years to come!

Peter-Anthony Togni