











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Soprano makes satirical splash

Winnipeg's Sarah Jo Kirsch star of New Music Festival's final night

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7 May 2015 STEPHAN BONFIELD

SPOTLIGHT Calgary New Music Festival presents Land's End Ensemble's Visual Music Festival Hall

Land's End Ensemble completed their 2014-15 season titled Painting Music on Tuesday night at Festival Hall, offering more of their provocative repertoire, this time by composers Chris Paul Harman and Gyorgy Ligeti.

The Tuesday night lineup went

with the title Visual Music, and formed only the second concert of the fledgling Calgary New Music Festival, launched Monday night, directed by Melanie Leonard.

Newly appointed Land's End Artistic Advisor Vincent Ho called the audience's attention to the screen to his right to demonstrate various art works in different media that were displayed throughout the evening, including works by Kerry Warner, Aron McCormick

and Brianna Strong.

A summary review of these fine artists' accomplishments transcends this article, but nevertheless requires a comment: more of this kind of visual artistic engagement with music would be appealing to the audience and for good reason. We can no longer exist in a musical vacuum, and efforts in Calgary to unite the artistic disciplines are growing every season, and with worthwhile results.

The star of Tuesday night's show was easily Winnipeg soprano Sarah Jo Kirsch. Giving the Calgary premiere of Ligeti's voice and chamber music extractions Mysteries of the Macabre, taken from the composer's now-iconic opera Le Grande Macabre, it was Kirsch's unenviable task to sing the role of the deluded paranoid Gepopo, set by Elgar Howarth in three seamless arias, translated into English.

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In a conspicuously wellarranged chamber ensemble version by conductor Claude Lapalme, who provided stalwart direction throughout, the ensemble was given plenty of room for creative mimicry and expressive mockery of Gepopo's panic, as he tries to

convince the audience a comet is about to strike the planet.

But Kirsch's performance itself was the masterpiece. She had established herself already with the audience in the recital's first half when she gave a wonderfully onomatopoeic performance of the comic book sound- effect world *Stripsody*, a work I hadn't heard in a very long time, by the contemporary music diva of the 1960s and '70s Cathy Berberian.

Much like Berberian in performing arts acumen, but quite different in vocal type, Kirsch was a complete natural, because she has, to put it plainly, a great voice. She is one of the finest contemporary dramatic

vocalists in Canada today, and the paranoia evinced by her natural gift for expressive vocal acrobatics, amplified by the ensemble's insistent and splashy colours typical of many parts of Ligeti's chamber music, made this an outstanding live performance experience for us all.

Kirsch's seemingly endless supply of high notes, trills and screams were perfectly acted to suit the mood of paranoia exerting control over that which cannot be subdued. The complicit cabaret atmosphere provided by the ensemble enhanced her character's dissolution into madness. Preceding the Ligeti was an excellent work by the well- known McGill composi-



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The performance of this work was a complete success: the fragmentary, inchoate surface appeared of the motives actually galvanized into a splendid coherent whole by the work's end. Also on the program was a fine solo trumpet performance of HK Gruber's *Exposure* and a successful performance of Richard Ayers' *34b*.

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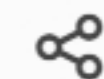
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