

A mixed media triumph in Banff

Music, technology, East and West meet in Constantinople

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At the conclusion of the premiere of Constantinople at the Banff Centre's Eric Harvie Theatre on Thursday, the near-capacity audience gave the work and its performers a long standing ovation. No wonder.

Although destined perhaps by its very nature to seem less than the sum of its considerable parts, the 90-minute multimedia piece weaves a bold and richly emotional tapestry of sound and image that clearly represents a stunning triumph in the marriage of music with digital technology.

Toronto composer Christos Hatzis' score is an artful and frequently arresting blend of western classical, liturgical and Middle Eastern tradition with infusions from more contemporary styles, such as jazz and pop. It is performed flawlessly and miraculously by the Gryphon Trio – pianist Jamie Parker, violinist Annalee Patipatanakoon and cellist Roman Borys – and singers Maryem Tollar and Patricia O'Callaghan. It's a complex multi-layered work in eight movements, each a ritual point of departure on an imagined journey towards spiritual convergence between East and West.

Musically and visually, everything is in a state of flux in Constantinople. In Creeds, for example, O'Callaghan's beautifully sung Byzantine chant and Tollar's Islamic equivalent, change into a kind of instrumental Turkish dance – while images of stained glass and tracery parade up and down and across set designer Bernard White's two scrim arches.

Likewise, the ensuing quiet and medieval-sounding Kyrie, also sung by O'Callaghan, turns into an impassioned plea rising above the noise of battle in sound designer Anthony Crea's typically powerful surround-soundscape.

The imagery chosen here by projection design wizards Jacques Collin and Lionel Arnould morphs ingeniously from abstraction into two gnarled brambles.

Elsewhere, Tollar's performance of the Sufi song, *Ah Kalleli*, processed and played back quadraphonically and ending in the fervour of a gospel riff, lodges in the memory – as does the repetition of an original folk-like melody. The melody builds, with processed fragments from Giuseppe Verdi's *Dies Irae* and once more the soundscape of modern warfare, to a climactic moment at the spiritual core of *Constantinople, On Death and Dying*.

Other instances of Hatzis's chameleon-like ability for assimilating musical styles in *Constantinople* include a charming, off-kilter percussive dance à la Stravinsky that keeps moving forward in *Odd World*; catchy little vaudeville tangos convey the nonsense of political posturing in *Dance of the Dictators*; and an elegiac solo piano piece that changes into an Astor Piazzola-like tango in *Old Photographs*, the most popular piece in Hatzis's score.

Appropriately enough for a work that illustrates strength through diversity, *Constantinople* concludes with a faltering Serbian Easter chant answered by a rousing note of gospel-style affirmation – *Alleluia* – which brings us back to the reaction to the work on opening night.