

## Cultures come together in Constantinople *Multimedia show at The Grand breathtaking*

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One of my favourite scenes in the James Bond movies is the opening of *From Russia with Love*. Here we observe a group of western tourists arriving on the ferry that crosses the Strait of Bosphorus from the Asian to the European Istanbul.

The camera shoots across the famous strait, a narrow strip of water that physically and psychologically separates both continents, the entire scene a visual vignette of the intersection of two cultures that can be summed up in one word: Istanbul -- or Constantinople as the city was called in older days.

It is these cultural resonances -- religious, conflictive, nostalgic, and contrasting -- that form the substance of Canadian composer Christos Hatzis' monumental, eight movement, 85-minute work entitled Constantinople.

Commissioned by The Gryphon Trio, which forms the performing core of the work, it also requires two singers, set and lighting designers, dancers, visual projections, and a recorded soundtrack.

The resulting multimedia piece, embracing the widest possible range of musical styles is, ultimately, unified through its evocation of the differing moods of medieval Christianity and Islam, a metaphor to convey the underlying message of the work: the sense of the common humanity that lies behind and beyond our culturally conditioned existence.

Such a massive undertaking requires immense commitment from all the performers and a firm belief in the fundamental worth of the music. This was clearly the case and the total effect of the work was overwhelming.

The two vocal soloists, Patricia O'Callaghan and Maryem Hassan Tollar, made an indelible impression, their demanding vocal lines sung eloquently and blending beautifully in duet.

O'Callaghan was outstanding in every way, her crossover-style soprano perfect for that subtle blending of the "old" and the "modern" that constitutes her part. Essentially, she is the voice of the West, and Tollar, equally impressive in a slightly different way, provides the voice of the East.

The most familiar portion of the score, heard in performances by the Gryphon Trio before the entire work was complete, is the purely instrumental movement Old Photographs.

While the relationship of this particular movement to the underlying theme of the work is less direct, the music itself is of such nostalgic beauty that it could melt the hardest of hearts.

The tango finale of this movement is irresistible, and was played with tremendous panache by the Trio.

The extended finale, based on a Serbian Easter hymn, provides an ecstatic conclusion, a fusion of theatre, music, and stylized dance movements -- all enacted against the backdrop of visual projections that, inevitably, bring to mind Constantinople's most famous building, the basilica St. Sophia.

Once Christian, then an Islamic mosque, and now a museum, its name refers to the idea of wisdom, a fine visual symbol for this most unusual and fascinating work.

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