

PRESS RELEASE



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February 25, 2008

The Montreal Premiere of Ruth Fazal's *Oratorio Terezin*: a Vanier College benefit concert

Vanier College takes great pride in announcing that the Vanier Music Department will produce the Montreal Premiere of Ruth Fazal's monumental *Oratorio Terezin* in a benefit concert on Sunday, May 4, 2008 at 3PM, in Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier at Place des Arts. A magnificent classical work for symphony orchestra, two choirs (children and adult, comprising 220 voices) and three vocal soloists, *Oratorio Terezin* has been performed all over the world including New York's Carnegie Hall.

The Vanier College production of *Oratorio Terezin* will be one of the highlights of the Montreal celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the State of Israel. It is also a testament to Vanier's ongoing effort to bring innovative and inspiring programs to a multi-ethnic student population of 6000 students that educate and promote a dialogue about tolerance.

For the Montreal production the Vanier College Choir and the McGill Conservatory Youth Choir both directed by Vanier Choir Director Erica Phare, will be joined by two other prominent Montreal choirs, Concerto Della Donna and Le chœur des enfants de Montréal, and accompanied by Ensemble Amati under the baton of guest conductor, Iwan Edwards. Tenor, Colin Ainsworth, baritone, Nathaniel Watson, and soprano, Teresa Maria Gomez will be the guest soloists.

Based on poems written by children who perished in Auschwitz, *Oratorio Terezin* is a powerful portrayal of the yearning and strength of the human spirit in the midst of the awful suffering of the Holocaust. Inspired by reading a book entitled *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* consisting of poetry and art by children of the Terezin concentration camp during the years 1941-44, Toronto composer Ruth Fazal responded to what she calls "A Divine Commission" to create a work dedicated to peace. First performed in Toronto in 2003, the Oratorio has since toured Bratislava, Vienna, Brno, Prague, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Karmiel, and New York.

Planning for the Vanier College production of *Oratorio Terezin* began more than three years ago when Erica Phare participated in the European tour. "I was so enthralled by this magnificent work where the voices of today's children speak for those who were silenced over sixty years ago, that I thought Vanier students just had to perform it," indicates Erica. After seeing a performance, Music Coordinator Dr. Nadia Turbide agreed, "I soon became totally committed to bringing this work to Montreal."



Preparing students for the performance goes well beyond learning music and singing words. Understanding the work historically and emotionally is crucial to performing it well. As a result, Erica Phare has brought her students to see plays on the Holocaust, organized weekend choir camps, visited the Holocaust Memorial Centre, read books, and heard from Holocaust survivors.

For many students, working on *Oratorio Terezin* is life changing. One of Erica's students who started a Facebook entry on *Oratorio Terezin* comments, "Terezin is really amazing!! It's 10:30 at night and I'm still thinking about that children's song at the very end, and the sound of those church bells in the final bars. Really chilling stuff... I'm so glad we're doing this. I have never connected with music like I have with Oratorio."

The enthusiasm and interest among Vanier music students is so great, that the Vanier Choir which normally counts some eighty voices, has expanded to more than 100 as additional students have asked to audit the choir class and perform the Oratorio.

Seeing the commitment of Vanier to the Montreal production is heart-warming to Ruth Fazal. "This will be the first time I turn the *Oratorio* over to someone else to produce," she reveals. "I know it is in very good hands here at Vanier."

Tickets are now on sale at the Place des Arts box office.

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