

**Georgian Music Review – Christmas Memories – Judy Loman, harp - Monica Whicher, soprano - Marty Smyth, organ - Sunday December 10th, 2017 - 2:30 p.m.**



Submitted by Catherine Waffle

***Christmas Memories***

With its bold opening chords, the organ at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church heralded the arrival of the Christmas season. The Barrie audience who attended the Georgian Music series enjoyed the performances of three consummate professionals on Sunday afternoon. Judy Loman is a Canadian legend on the harp. Now in her early 80's, she plays with the vigour and mastery of a musician in her prime. She shared the stage with the dazzling soprano, Monica Whicher and organist, Marty Smyth. The program moved seamlessly from solo to duo to trio.

The clear, bell-like soprano voice of Ms. Whicher was featured in two selections from Handel's *Messiah* as accompanied by the organ. She beautifully spun out the long phrases in the less frequently performed soprano solo –“If God Be For Us, Who Can Be Against Us”. Ms. Loman joined Ms. Whicher for four, traditional, French Canadian songs. Judy Loman had arranged these songs for harp and soprano. They showcased the intricacies of the harp as notes rippled and swelled beneath the vocal melodies. In one of the songs, the percussive elements of the harp were featured as Ms. Loman used the wooden harp frame like a drum with a tapping effect.

A brighter solo harp sound filled the church in the “Concert Variations on Adeste Fideles”. This arrangement explored the full range of the harp; from its delicate tones to a full-bodied resonance. The thrilling arpeggio action showcased the virtuosic abilities of Ms. Loman on the harp.

To cap off the first half of the concert the three performers combined to present Christmas carol favourites. The organ supported and contrasted the percussive harp elements and vocal lines with a quiet, sustained sound. Ms. Loman's rich arrangements of “In the Bleak Mid-Winter”, “In dulci jubilo” and “The Wexford Carol” lent such depth to these familiar melodies.

In the second half of this concert Ms. Loman did double duty on some percussion instruments attached to her music stand as well as playing the harp. Ms. Whicher demonstrated her vocal power in some electric moments achieved in “The Little Road to Bethlehem”. A haunting arrangement of “Away in a Manger” in a minor key ended with a satisfying major chord on the harp. The centrepiece of this portion of the concert featured Ms. Loman in a harp solo based on “A Ceremony of Carols” by Britten. A deep spirituality and sense of quiet devotion was achieved as she performed with such mastery. The audience was still. It was mesmerizing for young and old alike. The trio concluded the concert with “O Holy Night” which proceeded to its ravishingly beautiful ending that thrilled the crowd.

The concert could only be described as a warm, shimmering experience on a cold winter’s day.