

## ARTS

# Gatineau ensembles overcome tentative start

BY RICHARD TODD

Last night, the second concert in this year's Outaouais Sacred Music Festival, at St-Benoît-Abbé Church in Gatineau, featured two major Bach works for soloists, chorus and orchestra.

The chorus of about forty voices was made up of members of the Cantata Singers and Seventeen Voyces, the orchestra was the Gatineau Symphony and Laurence Ewashko conducted.

The first offering was the cantata *Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben*, BWV 147, from which comes the famous chorale *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*.

The chorus sounded more than a little tentative in the opening measures, though it was reasonably solid for the most part afterward.

Given the traditional sizes of the constituent choirs, it should have numbered somewhere between 60 and 70 voices. No doubt, the "cold that's going around" accounted partly for the small number. There has also been some attrition in the Cantata Singers.

The orchestra, which was called the Hull Chamber Orchestra in pre-amalgamation times, has led a tenuous existence in recent years. Much of its 2003-2004 season was cancelled, but last night its latest incarnation played with confidence and style. The solo and continuo playing were generally strong, despite a few lapses of intonation.

The vocal soloists were uncommonly strong by the standards of previous Outaouais festivals, with special nods going to soprano Pascale Beaudin and contralto Sonia Sasseville.

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We normally think of an oratorio as being a bigger work than a cantata, but Bach's *Easter Oratorio*, BWV 249 is shorter than *Herz und Mund* and, in fact, quite a few of his other cantatas.

What does set it apart is its use of dialogue in telling its story, dialogue in which tenor Sarkis Barsemian and baritone Luc Lalonde were most effective.

The chorus was considerably more focussed in the oratorio, beginning with the first vocal number, *Kommt, eilet und laufet* (Come, hurry and run) and especially in the triumphant chorale *Preis und Dank* (Praise and Thanks).

But without a doubt, the highlight of the performance, and of the evening, was soprano Beaudin's glorious rendition of the aria *Seele, deine Spezereien* (O Soul, thy spices need no longer be myrrh).

A handful of festival events remain. A narrated concert of Messiaen's *Visions de l'Amen* on Oct. 2 should be particularly rewarding. For information on all of the programs, see [www.sacree.qc.ca](http://www.sacree.qc.ca).