

Flood concerto holds water

McGill Chamber Choir presents an inspired Katrina commentary

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Many American pieces start life as political commentaries or commemorations of tragic events. On Tuesday, the 42-voice McGill Chamber Choir under Julian Wachner presented the Canadian premiere of *Après moi, le déluge*, by Luna Pearl Woolf, an American composer who has settled in Montreal with her husband, cellist Matt Haimovitz.

Hubby was on hand for the performance in Pollack Hall, providing an obbligato that both animated and deepened the 25-minute opus. Woolf admitted that she had started work on a concerto for cello and choir before the Katrina disaster (and a poem by Eleanor Wilner) stirred her creative juices.

And the music did sound inspired. Wails, whispers and other modernist devices were deployed to the greater good of the whole. The spirit was rhapsodic, but the effect strongly integrated. Not a moment dragged.

It all ended, of course, with a bluesy New Orleans apotheosis. Perhaps Woolf could have found a more individual way of cross-pollinating the down-home syncopations with her own style. Anyway, the piece is a hit.

Wachner drew a fiery sound from the student choir, made mostly of first- and second-year saplings. There were a couple of confident solos. The young 'uns were less interested, with reason, in *Ma'at Musings*, by Trevor Weston, an American who was present for the performance. This low-voltage number with two percussionists was supposedly pregnant with political content.

Also heard was *Africa*, a resolutely tonal effort by Vancouver native Brian Tate. There were tambourines in this pleasant work, popular with the small crowd.

You must permit me a grumble, however, when the Canadian piece on a program is called "Africa." How many Africans are writing works called "Canada"?