

Winnipeg composer puts ear to Arctic ice for musical inspiration

Arctic symphony to debut at 2010 New Music Festival

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[CBC News](#)

The Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra's composer-in-residence is on a week-long journey in Canada's North, hoping to capture the beauty of the Arctic Ocean and the hard data of scientists in a musical composition.



The Canadian Coast Guard Ship Amundsen is specifically fitted for Arctic scientific research. (CBC) Vincent Ho has been commissioned to compose a 30-minute symphony based on his upcoming trip aboard the Canadian Coast Guard Ship Amundsen, which is in the Beaufort Sea.

Ho arrived in Inuvik, N.W.T., on Monday to begin his research, videotaping local landmarks and soaking up the northern landscape.

Ho will soon board the Amundsen to capture a very different landscape — the stark expanse of Beaufort Sea ice — and watch researchers working on the Circumpolar Flaw Lead System Study collect scientific data and conduct experiments.

"As I'm writing the piece, the information that I've learned from the scientific community is going to influence my perspective of how I see this northern area," Ho told CBC News from Inuvik.

Melding art with science is nothing new: visual artists have interpreted Arctic landscapes from early polar expeditions in centuries past.

Ho said he hopes he can translate hard science on board the Amundsen into a beautiful piece of music.

"Global warming is a big topic these days, and the scientific community is trying their best to get the word out as best as possible," he said in an interview Wednesday.

"By commissioning a work like this, they hope to spread the awareness of global warming to a demographic that may not be exposed to their world or understand what global warming is from a scientific level."

Scientists have given the composer a warm welcome so far.

"I've been received with great enthusiasm," Ho said. "There's that general curiosity as to how their world is

going to be perceived from an artistic standpoint, and then translated through a creative process."

Ho's journey is being watched by Lucette Barber, co-ordinator of the Schools on Board outreach program based at the University of Manitoba.

The program, which brings youth onto the Amundsen, is hosting Ho's excursion onboard the icebreaker through its Artists on Board project.

"It's just a very good medium to take the information out of its labs and out of its publications, and into a forum that is approachable by many and reaches audiences that may not be looking at these very scientific publications," she said.

The symphony, which Ho has tentatively titled *Arctic Symphony*, is expected to debut at the gala opening of the 2010 Winnipeg New Music Festival.

"As far as I know, I don't think anybody's written an Arctic symphony," Ho said with a laugh. "I guess it'd be great to have somebody write a symphony that would be inspired from their travels in the North Pole."