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## MUSIC

Winnipeg Free Press - PRINT EDITION

# Triple treat earns standing ovations

## Victoria violinist wows Winnipeg audience

By: [Holly Harris](#)

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The Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra served up a triple treat of orchestral works Friday night, including a world première by its former composer-in-residence, Vincent Ho.

Its latest Masterworks concert led by Alexander Mickelthwate also featured Canadian violinist Nikki Chooi performing Antonin Dvorak's Concerto in A minor, Op. 53, that proved why this up-and-comer is one to watch.

### CONCERT REVIEW

Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra

Masterworks

Dvorák & Rachmaninoff

Centennial Concert Hall

Friday, February 27

Attendance: 1,005

(Four stars out of five)

The Victoria, B.C.-born violinist recently graduated from New York City's Juilliard School after completing his undergraduate degree at the Curtis Institute of Music. He first garnered national attention for winning the top prize at the Canadian National Music Festival in 2004, with his many subsequent awards including first prize at New Zealand's 2013 Michael Hill International Violin Competition. He notably performs on a 1700 "Taft" Stradivari on loan from the Canada Council for the Arts — notably 179 years older than his featured concerto — that became another treat in itself.

Chooi is an arresting performer who fearlessly tackled the demands at hand. He displayed his verve during the opening Allegro ma non troppo with fierce conviction. His stratospheric high notes were unfailingly precise, with only a few minor

intonation difficulties on the way up.

He showed his more lyrical side during the second movement Adagio ma non troppo — as well as honeyed tone from his priceless fiddle — while imbuing its sentimental themes with nostalgia born of yesterday.

Then it became time for the rollicking rondo. Here, Chooi ably captured its ebullient, folksy theme's effervescent nature, including enthralling runs and ruggedly bowed double stops. The audience sprang to its feet in a standing ovation that led to three curtain calls by the beaming violinist.

Appointed the WSO's composer-in-residence in 2007, Ho has left his indelible, creative stamp on the organization that premièred many of his larger-scale works including his critically acclaimed percussion concerto, The Shaman, composed for Dame Evelyn Glennie.

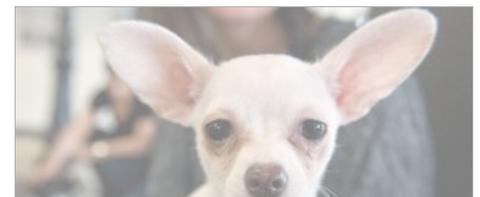
His latest, Postlude: Song of Hope, celebrates the opening of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, based on text by Chinese-Canadian writer Lien Chao, and in turn, inspired by composers Valentin

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Ho has always been a composer of epic imagination, at his very best with intensely dramatic works such as his Shaman concerto, Dragon Realms and Arctic Symphony, among others. In his final WSO commission — at least for now — Ho seems to hold nothing back, immediately establishing an imagistic sound world that bellows and heaves with the cares of the world. His rich tonal palette pits rumbling, low brass against rising wisps of strings, as well as an effective solo performed by WSO concertmaster Gwen Hoebig.

When guest vocalist Lara Ciekiewicz — gowned and bare-footed — enters the stage, it is as though a benevolent wise woman has descended upon their midst. Her soaring soprano, climaxing on the word "hope," expands the work further (albeit at times competing with the multi-layered strings), with her radiant presence earning a standing ovation by the clearly moved crowd of 1,005.

The program also included the WSO premiere of Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 44, composed between 1935-36. Under Mickelthwate's baton, its three movements ebbed and flowed, including its lushly scored, Russian-infused themes, until the final nail-biting fugato, underscored by the always chilling "Dies Irae" theme.

As expected, the audience leapt to its feet again for the third and final ovation of the night.

The concert repeats tonight, 8 p.m. at the Centennial Concert Hall.

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6. 'Blurred Lines' - Trial provided the inside story of the making, and unraveling, of a hit song
7. Celine Dion to return to Vegas stage, but singer's rep doesn't say when; last show was in July
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