

HOPE

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The only thing that might have ever shadowed the lively, high-energy production of the musical *Hope*, performed by a talented group of young people on September 28 at the Canadian Martyrs Catholic Church, would be the humbleness of the Jose family, who led the vibrant cast to the highest levels possible for choral harmony— so complex, so tender and sweet you couldn't hear a baby cry or a pin drop all night.

The Jose family, consisting of wife and husband Liza and RJ, their daughter, Tricia, and son, Mikey, is well-known in Richmond for the inspirational choir they lead at the Canadian Martyrs' 11:45 am Sunday Mass. The choir's rich blend of male and female voices sync with the roving precision of the dynamic 17-year-old virtuoso pianist, Mikey, from adagio to allegro, from crescendo to decrescendo. His chords are so intricately interwoven with percussive transitions that it is almost as if he only plays one long and pleasing arpeggio for which the ear never tires.

On Sunday evening, an accomplished flutist embellished the heavenly harmonies of the evening with a high-pitched texture that chirped like a nightingale. A skilled guitarist added an unobtrusive rhythm that danced tastefully between the singers and Mikey's piano chords. A wonderful violinist drew her bow gently across the strings in the



background, strategically harmonizing with the flute and singers, smoothing out syncopated piano and guitar rhythms with a soothing softness. A percussionist gave clear and precise

definition to the pulse of the faster musical selections.

The evening commenced precisely at 7 pm, when Liza Jose welcomed everyone in the crowded space to the mutual tribute they and the cast were making to God. After Rev. Paul Chu gave a spiritual blessing to all present, Liza made it exceedingly clear that the Jose family deserved no credit, accolades or acclaim, whatsoever. That all praise “goes to the glory of God.”

Then, something unexpected happened. A large group of young people dressed in identical red-coloured shirts stood up and moved in unison like a scarlet wave toward the stage. Once there, the group divided, with one cluster looping around the back to join the rest at the other side of the stage. The elevated platform itself remained empty.

A beautiful young woman slowly walked to centre stage, in front of a thin vertical pole with a crucifix on top and a number of artistic props side by side, converting the platform into a theatrical stage. She stopped and looked out into the audience for a few silent moments with a timid look upon her face. Then, as her eyes sparkled in the bright spotlight, she began to sing.

In an instant our ears absorbed her flawless voice. Her pitch-perfect melody entered the innermost regions of our spiritual essence, awakening our senses to celebrate what could only be described as a divine moment. This magnificent voice honoured those in attendance with a special elegance that filled our hearts with awe and our minds with the realization that we were in the midst of something great. Something extraordinary was not only about to happen, but had arrived in the blink of an eye.

Then, in the background of this musical epiphany, gracefully induced by a solo of angelic proportions, a barely audible sound could faintly be detected. Gradually this grew louder, to be identified as the voices of the young choir that surrounded her solitary tone with full-bodied harmony, layering the holy chamber with fullness, stereophonic wholeness, so beautiful, so complete that tiny bubbles began to form in my eyes along with a smile of appreciation that almost touched my ears. My body was saying “*Thank you*” before the song was over.

The room rumbled with exuberance after the singers finished. A group of children entered from the side of the stage and began singing, “Shine Like the Son.” They looked so happy, swaying to the pulsating tempo, bending and raising their arms in a delightful synchronized choreography. Without revealing too much about the content of the play, I’ll just say it featured a number of moving stories about losing hope and lacking faith—but also about regaining hope and finding faith, told by 10 young actors. All their powerful stories were written by the creative team of the Jose family. Linette Mae Ocariza and Joachim Wu researched their individual

parts and contributed greatly to the development of their characters.

Joachim, who played a central role with a touching soliloquy that commingled historical fact with a tragic narrative about modern-day Christians, mentioned in the program handout, “Originally, I was only on the planning team for *Hope*. However, as the cast began to form, I wanted more and more to be part of the cast...breaking out of my comfort zone... My part...led me to do a lot of research, and has allowed me to be much more aware of current situations around the world.”

Many ethical and biblical messages about life, love and God punctuated the evening in song, monologue and dialogue. The audience received a great deal of information in a very short time—just one hour. And all of the information was presented in an emotionally captivating way—one that touched the mind, heart and soul in a manner that did not overwhelm.

What a great night! I left the church hoping to see the production *Hope* again and saying, “Glory be to God.”

