

# Critic's Pick ... Chor Leoni / Wandering Heart, Erick Lichte, Artistic Director

*T. J. Harper, DMA, choral conductor and teacher*

## ***Chor Leoni / Wandering Heart***

Erick Lichte, Artistic Director

Chan Center for the Performing Arts, Vancouver, British Columbia

(2016; 1:07:17)

<https://chorleoni.org/>



Recorded in the stunning acoustic setting of Vancouver's Chan Centre for the Performing Arts with GRAMMY award-winning producer Steve Barnett, Wandering Heart is simply beautiful. This is the choir's first recording since 2011, and its first recording under the direction of Erick Lichte. Founded in 1992 by acclaimed conductor Diane Loomer the Chor Leoni Men's

Choir, which is “known internationally and loved locally”, is recognized as one of the world’s foremost male vocal ensembles. Chor Leoni prides itself on its musical ambassadorship for Vancouver and Canada and has performed at major festivals and concert venues across Canada and the United States. Internationally, the choir has shared its music in Italy, Croatia, Bosnia, Germany, and the Czech Republic.

Erick Lichte has carved out a distinct niche in the vocal music world and concert life in North America. As a founding member, singer and artistic director of the male vocal ensemble Cantus, Lichte created and sustained one of only two full-time vocal ensembles in the United States. His work with Cantus garnered the 2009 Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence, the highest honour for the professional choral organization Chorus America. As a choral conductor, Lichte has served as conductor for many professional, educational and amateur choral ensembles. In January of 2013, he began his tenure as Artistic Director of Chor Leoni Men’s Choir. Lichte is an active clinician and guest conductor, and is especially passionate in his work to get young men singing. Lichte is a published composer and arranger, especially known for his writing in *All is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914* which has been taken on seven North American tours.

***Stars*** (track #1) by Ēriks Ešvalds with text by Sara Teasdale (1884-1933) is published by Musica Baltica. This is the male choir world premiere recording. Composer Ešvalds recalls the inspiration for this work: “I remember being out in the country in my native town in Latvia to celebrate Christmas with my parents. After dinner, I went out to have a silent walk in the cold winter night and, in my 30 years, I was never as impressed by the view in the sky – the stars were so bright! I couldn’t believe that in my youth I hadn’t seen such a powerful sky-scape before. Now there was something very special speaking to me from the sky. I couldn’t name it.”

***I Saw Eternity*** (track #2) by Paul Mealor with text by Henry

Vaughan (1621-1695) from The World is published by Novello & Company, Ltd. "Henry Vaughan's poetry stands alongside the works of Donne and Herbert as metaphysically inclined and spiritually rich. Mealor sets the opening lines of Vaughan's poem 'The World' for male choir, soloists, wind chimes and soprano saxophone to create a dense but luminous texture. The choir's role provides not only a cosmic backdrop for the work but also a swelling one."

***Wandering Heart*** (tracks #3-#5) by Ēriks Ešenvalds with text by Leonard Cohen (1934-2016) from The Spice Box of Earth is published by Musica Baltica and commissioned by Chor Leoni Men's Choir with funds from the Diane Loomer Commissioning Fund. This is the world premiere recording and stands as a testament to the lasting memory of singer, songwriter, poet, painter, Leonard Cohen. In Ešenvalds own words, "My cycle of three songs to words of Leonard Cohen has become, in the voices of Chor Leoni and through the hands of Erick Lichte, like a symphony with a true orchestral, multi-dimensional depth. *Wandering Heart* is a symphony where the instruments – the real Canadian singing men – have opened the books of their life-stories. We can hear pages from their childhoods, sweet memories, their first-love stories, their life-long dreams and their destinies."

***Adspice Domine (Vespergesang: tracks #6-#9)*** Op. 121 by Felix Mendelssohn (1833, published posthumously in 1874). "The *Vespergesang*, Op. 121, is one of the few medium-scale works for male choral forces written by Mendelssohn and for this alone, *Wandering Heart* is well-worth the price of admission. Mendelssohn's score provides parts for only a four-part male chorus and a cello and double bass accompaniment. The work sets the liturgical texts of the Vespers for the 21st Sunday after Trinity. The first and third movements feature Baroque-inspired imitative polyphonic textures. The very short second movement presents the prescribed plainchant from the liturgy, which Mendelssohn then develops and illuminates in the third

movement. Finally, the dawn breaks through the darkness with the chorale-like setting of St. Ambrose's *O Lux Beata Trinitas*."

***Even When He Is Silent*** (track #10) by Kim André Arnesen with text by an anonymous source is published by Walton Music. This is the male Choir world premiere recording. "This male choir premiere recording of *Even When He Is Silent* takes the composer's setting for female voices and lowers the pitches by a 7th. While most male choral works voice their chords in root position, this adaptation of an SSAA work features tight low harmonies in first and third inversions, which brings out both the darkness and the light of this anonymous 20th century text."

***Sure on This Shining Night*** (track #11) by Morten Lauridsen with text by James Agee from *Description of Elysium* is published by Hal Leonard. This is a beautiful, thoughtful, and solid performance of a contemporary classic by America's composer laureate.

***Yahrzeit*** (track #12) by Robert Moran with text by James Skofield is taken directly from the manuscript. This is the world premiere recording. "The text of *Yahrzeit* was written by James Skofield in memoriam to his 40-year-old partner, Michael, who died from AIDS. When his many friends couldn't agree upon a time for his NYC memorial service, James commissioned me to write a work in his memory. *Yahrzeit* is the Jewish celebration, in any manner, of the departed person on the anniversary of his or her death. This could be a concert 'in memory,' a poem shared by all, a party, etc. and happens on that death date of that specific person. It is a lovely idea. I wish to have *Yahrzeit* as a musical reflection on "someone, something no longer with us...but just a memory."

***Long Road*** (track #13) by Ēriks Ešenvalds with text by Paulīna Bārda (1890-1983) and translated by Elaine Singley Lloyd is published by Musica Baltica. Set for male choir and

commissioned by Chor Leoni through the Diane Loomer Commissioning Fund. "Much of Paulīna Bārda's poetry speaks of loving him as does *Long Road*. When reading it, I felt for a moment that her memories of their past had become so real. There are not many words in the poem, so after the last word was said I turned the music into a sound-scape or picture; painting one's eyes gazing towards the sky, searching for the star, and whispering the heart's prayer for the beloved one."

*Edited by Eviano George, Mexico*