

Halley's Comment

"A musician's Remembrance Day quandary"

Paul Halley speaks in an interview at St. George's Anglican Church, with Paul McLeod of METRO HALIFAX, November 10, 2008.

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PAUL MCLEOD, METRO HALIFAX
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Symphony Nova Scotia trumpeter Curtis Dietz joins the choir from the balcony yesterday evening during the Remembrance Service at St. George's Round Church.

'Remembrance Day presents a unique challenge to musicians — how do you elicit emotion without being heavy-handed? "The main thing is the music needs to be moving. It can't be trite. It can't be... simplistic. But you don't want to get into the realm of being overblown," said Paul Halley, conductor of the choir of St. George's Anglican Church in Halifax.

Halley was faced with the challenge of crafting the music for St. George's Remembrance Day ceremony last night. He wanted something powerful without being "too maudlin." He went with a mix of the traditional and unconventional. Symphony Nova Scotia trumpeter Curtis Dietz would join the choir from the top of the back balcony. His horn mingled with voices, forming a cacophony of melody.

"What's great to me about having Remembrance Day acknowledged in a church like St. George's is that it falls in a 2000-year-old tradition... that deals with loss," said Halley. "And it's been dealing with this for 2000 years. And it's gotten really good at it. So when I'm choosing the music, I need to make sure it fits in that whole tradition." Of course, traditional doesn't have to mean old. Alongside church and Remembrance Day standards, Halley chose the 1981 John Tavener hymn *Funeral Ikos* and a musical version of Lawrence Binyon's poem *For the Fallen*. To Halley, the key seems to be not to try too hard. He said Remembrance Day services are inherently very powerful. The music needs to compliment that, rather than try to be drastically different. "It wasn't like a special service. It was evensong, but the focus of it was on Remembrance Sunday," he said. "And the focus was on those who gave their lives."

The music drew rave reviews from the congregation. "It was a wonderful service," said World War II veteran Hugh Tilley. "I really liked the business of having the trumpeter. It makes an atmosphere that otherwise you don't get."