

Virginia Children's Chorus

I Never Saw Another Butterfly

featuring the
Virginia Symphony Orchestra

On May 2, 2001, the *Virginia Children's Chorus* undertook one of its most challenging programs to date. As a feature of the Virginia Arts Festival the Concert Choir presented *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, at Norfolk's Roper Performing Arts Center. Composed by Cantor Charles Davidson, *Butterfly* is a 40-minute song cycle based on original poems written by children interned in the Nazi ghetto of Terezin, Czechoslovakia during the Holocaust. The VCC produced this deeply moving work in cooperation with the Chestnut Youth Chorale from Baltimore, Maryland.

A stunning piece of art music, *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* is also a multimedia cultural event involving children's choir, symphony orchestra, choreography, lighting, set design and costuming. The children's choir is the focus of the work, as it is children's poetry from the Holocaust that is being represented. The texts are (translated) original children's poems from Terezin, the vocal writing ideal for children's voices, the orchestration light yet dramatic and perfectly balanced with the children's vocal parts. In addition to the VCC and holocaust survivors from the community, the Virginia premiere featured the Virginia Symphony, conducted by Wes Kenney, choreography by Todd Rosenlieb and Kathy Brenner, and lighting design and photography by Philip Watson (see photo above).

Cohen's "I Remember," masterfully performed by the Virginia Chamber players opened the evening's program. The performing Chamber Players were: Sondra Gelb, contralto; Debra Wendells Cross, flute; Michael Daniels, violoncello; Barbara Chapman, harp. There were also comments from local community leaders and Holocaust survivors interwoven into the production. This was an extremely difficult and moving subject to present artistically. It was our aim to bring a positive message to the audience: that even when faced with the stark reality of death and despair, there is also a theme of survival and the joyful resurgence of the Jewish culture, a message of hope and renewal.

"The presentation of I Never Saw Another Butterfly by the Virginia Children's Chorus was as deeply moving as any performance that I've conducted. Carol Thomas Downing did an amazing job of preparing the young vocalists to communicate a text that is mostly heart-breaking, often frightening, and very difficult. By far the best work I've heard to date from the VCC and another demonstration of the continued growth of this ensemble. I'm proud to have been a part of this riveting event."

Wes Kenney, Associate Conductor
Virginia Symphony

"The recent performance of I Never Saw Another Butterfly by the Virginia Children's Chorus and the Virginia Symphony was one of the most poignant and moving events of this year's Virginia Arts Festival. The program embodied the purpose of the arts...to provide an outlet of creativity and individualism in any situation, for any age, even children living with the tragedy of the holocaust. The Virginia Arts Festival was proud to be a part of such a moving performance."

Robert W. Cross, Director
Virginia Arts Festival

The VCC would like to thank Wes Kenney and the Virginia Symphony, and Rob Cross and the Virginia Arts Festival for making *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* possible.

