

Luminato Day Two: Heaven is a repurposed warehouse
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Across town to Dufferin Street, arriving in another part of Toronto composed of industrial buildings now sometimes pressed into the service of art (and ironically just steps from the local franchise of [Medieval Times](#)). A crowd of hundreds was marshalled into a dusty old warehouse to catch the second performance and official premiere of Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer's new opera, [The Children's Crusade](#).

This is already known as the thing where you get herded from place to place and stand for 90 minutes (there are a few chairs for those who need them, and the space is accessible for wheelchairs). Funny, I couldn't get anyone to go with me. Well, if you turned down my extra ticket, you missed out.

The Children's Crusade struggles in places to piece together its own idiom, bringing together in a postmodern fashion an anachronistic jumble of costumes, musical styles and instruments to tell the story of a ragtag band of 13th-century French orphans on a Christian quest to reach Jerusalem with their message of universal love.

Schafer has created an inventive, thought-provoking and sometimes moving piece of theatre, but not a perfect one. The cinematic finish lives up to the promise of the haunting beginning, but there are scenes in between that veer into silliness.

That it mostly works is some kind of miracle, the most divine part of which is Schafer's ethereal score. **And if the music is the best thing about *The Children's Crusade* (well, that and the expert lighting** and Diego Matamoros as the devil in several guises ... oh, and the main kid, Jacob Abrahamse), the smartest thing about the opera is the way it makes the audience move from scene to scene like so many kids trailing the Holy Child. Call it dramatic complicity, making lamb-like followers of us all.

Judging by the long applause and positive audience chatter following the performance, *The*

Children's Crusade could end up being this year's must-see ticketed event — the [Black Watch](#) of 2009.

It did get a standing ovation, but then you guarantee one ahead of time when you take away all the seats.