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LIFE & ARTS

Boston Pops spreads holiday cheer at Proctors show

MUSIC REVIEW

BY BILL RICE

For *The Daily Gazette*

SCHENECTADY — Holiday concerts are among the most predictable performances on earth, but people love them all the same.

Especially if the performers are world class musicians playing in a world renowned orchestra.

That was the case at Proctors Theatre on Friday night when Keith Lockhart led the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra in a concert full of Christmas favorites. Appearing with "America's Orchestra" was *Gloriae Dei Cantores* a splendid choral group of about 50 singers from Orleans, Mass., and directed by Elizabeth Patterson.

The concert opened with a Christmas fanfare based on "Joy to the World," a complex work for orchestra and chorus. It was a perfect spirited opener, not for singing along.

Next on the program was "For Unto Us a Child Is Born" from Handel's "Messiah," a work with florid coloratura passages that

were beautifully sung by the singers from Cape Cod. It was so good one wanted to hear a few more sections from the masterwork.

The orchestra followed that with a pretty, strings only setting of "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear." A solid and stirring chorus/orchestra performance of "Go Tell It On the Mountain" came after that.

"Waltz of the Flowers" from Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker" opened with a swirling harp solo that was crisply played. Lockhart called for a brisk tempo and lots of emotion and the orchestra responded. It was not a "this is old hat" performance.

The highlight of the first half was a performance of "The Polar Express" (a world premiere on this tour). The "Express" is a touching tale about a kid believing in Santa based on the 1986 book by Chris Van Allsburg. Music by Alan Silvestri and Glen Ballard is from the 2004 movie inspired by the book.

The performance featured images from the book with expert narration by actor Will LeBow. Narrating and keeping pace with train music is no easy task and LeBow got the job done masterfully.

The second half of the concert opened with two sleigh rides, the first by Leroy Anderson (no Christmas concert ever happens without it). The second was a very jazzy arrangement of Prokofiev's sleigh ride from the "Lieutenant Kije Suite."

The chorus was outstanding singing "Good Cheer," a tricky unaccompanied ditty with challenging modern harmonies and tricky entrances from start to finish.

The audience favorite of the evening, though, was a tongue-in-cheek orchestra and chorus arrangement of "The Twelve Days of Christmas." The clever setting has everything but the kitchen sink tossed in including "Indian Love Call," Beethoven's Fifth, "Stars and Stripes Forever" and "Oklahoma."

Rex Smith of the Albany Times Union did a credible if a tad hammy job of narrating "The Twelve Days of Christmas" and the chorus, especially the ladies, had a chance to let their hair down in a sexy version of "Santa Baby."

Santa made a guest appearance before the closing audience sing-along. He looked O.K., but his elves need to pack him a new bag of jokes.

The Gloriæ Dei Cantores Report

Posted by [bsnyder](#) October 15, 2008

Allow me to stand aside this time, and give you St. Peter's terrific [Director of Music and Organist, Brian Harlow](#), and his notes on [this past weekend's concert](#):

On the afternoon of October 12th, a gorgeous fall day, the choir of Gloriæ Dei Cantores presented a program that was carefully and cleverly constructed. After a splendid fanfare with royal fanfare trumpets, we were treated to the schola singing the chant on which the fanfare was based. Then, a set of English polyphony was presented in a cumulative fashion. The first four-voice motet was sung by four singers; for the second motet a few more singers joined in; and finally, the full group was singing under the direction of their conductor, Elizabeth Patterson. The transitions were so smooth that I didn't even notice when she began conducting. Needless to say, this half of the program slowly grew to a wonderful climax. A fun piece for organ and brass allowed the choir a rest and the ears a break in sonority. I would have loved to hear more of the brass players! Following the early Western music, we were treated to deeply felt performances of Russian Orthodox choral music. I do not speak Russian, but the music just seemed so right and so convincing when sung by this group. An incredible dynamic and vocal range was on display, with some heartbreakingly beautiful moments. This set was my favorite part of the concert and it made me very prayerful.



The second half featured a group of American anthems by Adler, Rorem and Sowerby, bracketed by two accompanied Anglican Chants. This choir has worked tirelessly to promote far corners of the choral repertoire, including a great deal of American music. They offered performances that were strong and committed. I especially enjoyed Rorem's "Praise the Lord, O my soul." The Anglican chants were accompanied in an extremely colorful way, making use of many effects. Finishing this set was "Comes Autumn Time," an organ piece by Leo Sowerby that fits the 1930 Skinner organ like a glove. Organist David Chalmers played with excellent taste and used the organ to its full capacity. The final piece on the program was the monumental *Messe Solennelle* by Jean Langlais. Although I love this piece, I was not sure if I would have ended the program with it had I designed the program. I also felt that it lacked a little drive and energy. On the other hand, one of my choir members was thrilled and called it the high point of the concert.

The choir gave impassioned and careful performances of all of this music from memory, which really blew me away. You try memorizing the tenor part to the Langlais *Messe Solennelle* or the Rachmaninoff *All-Night Vigil*! As one person remarked, a concert of sacred music was so welcome after a scary and unstable week in the world's financial markets. It was a festive occasion, yet at the same time centered and prayerful. It gave everyone a chance to be still and bask in the gifts of music, of beauty, and of the presence of God. These "singers to the glory of God" are well-deserving of their name.

Brian Harlow



Life staff photos by KEN ZEPP

Members of the Gloria Dei Cantores perform "Santa Baby" with the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra during a medley at their holiday concert.

Boston Pops crackle and snap

■ **Boston Pops**, from Page 1

conversation not my own and overheard Lansdale Community Concerts Inc. president Donald Souder tell someone that, "This was the best concert we've ever had."

My apologies for eavesdropping, Mr. Souder, but I concur. Just to put an exclamation point on that sentiment, Younger Daughter concurred as well.

Once we got our turn with Lockhart, he proved as engaging offstage as he is onstage, taking

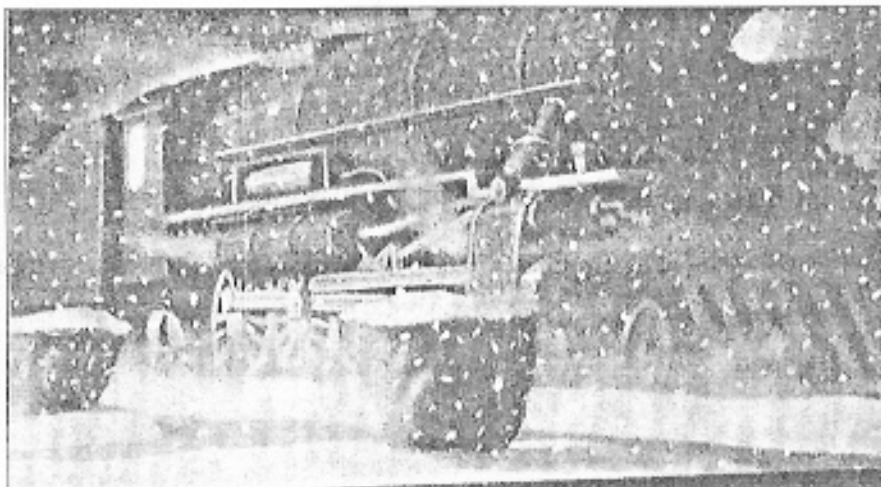
time to chat with everybody in line. While this may have caused a bit of consternation for those toward the back of the line because of the lateness of the hour, it was apparent that Lockhart takes his responsibility of meeting with fans as seriously as he does conducting and promoting the Pops. I, for one, appreciate that and will stand in line for as long as it takes to meet somebody who respects the fans that much.

Bravo Mr. Lockhart and the Pops musicians for lifting our spirits, bravo Gloriam Dei Cantores for

adding to the festivities, bravo Mr. Souder and Lansdale Community Concerts Inc. for finally bringing the Boston Pops to Lansdale.

Oh, and bravo Santa. The jokes weren't that bad. Don't forget about me on Christmas.

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Life staff photo

CHRISTMAS EXPRESS ... Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra and the Gloria Dei Cantores perform from the movie "Polar Express" at concert, Dec. 4 at North Penn High School.

12/05/2008

Boston Pops in Lansdale: A post-performance review
By Mike Morsch, Executive Editor



Boston Pops conductor Keith Lockhart admitted in an interview a few weeks ago that he relies on the highly skilled musicians in the famed orchestra to always bring their "A" game.

"We don't really have the opportunity to have off days," said Lockhart. And never was that more apparent Thursday evening at North Penn High School when Lockhart and the Pops - along with the Gloriae Dei Cantores choir - performed their popular holiday program for a packed house and, despite a period of political transition and economic uncertainty going on right now in the country, delivered an early Christmas present to the locals with a big red bow of a performance. Hey, this is the Boston Pops. Would anybody have expected any less?

Admittedly, I have been in the bag for the Pops for nearly 25 years. I first saw the orchestra in the mid-1980s, conducted by John Williams, and then again a few times after Lockhart took over in the mid-1990s as the 20th conductor of the group.

THE PLAIN DEALER



Visiting chorus does celestial work

Published: Thursday, October 16, 2008, 8:36 AM



Donald Rosenberg, The Plain Dealer

REVIEW

Gloriae Dei Cantores

The best choral singing forces you to sit up and give in to a torrent of silken and stentorian vocalism. Among the choral ensembles capable of grabbing ears and souls is Gloriae Dei Cantores from the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, Massachusetts.

The group's title translates Singers to the Glory of God, which couldn't be more accurate. As led by Elizabeth C. Patterson, Gloriae performs with a blend of fervor, balance and seamless interplay of voices that even mere mortals can savor.

One of the stops on the ensemble's month-long national tour was Fairmount Presbyterian Church in Cleveland Heights, where the chorus gave a program Wednesday for a sizable audience, even though the event overlapped with the final presidential debate.

Those who heard Gloriae on this occasion aren't likely to forget the experience. The program was a feast of periods and styles, ranging from Gregorian chant and Tudor anthems to Russian, American and French masterpieces. Along with voices, the concert included herald trumpets, a brass quintet, timpanist and two organists who filled every crevice of the church with vibrant sonorities.

But back to Gloriae, which Patterson has molded into a marvelously responsive and articulate guardian of the choral art. One can take exception to the somewhat juicy approach the singers brought to music of Byrd, Tallis and Dering, which would have benefited from fewer pinches of vibrato.

Elsewhere, the artistry drew the listener deeply into the emotional and spiritual realms depicted in the texts. The evening's most glorious moments came in the Russian repertoire of works by Chesnokov, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff.

Here, Patterson - who uses gestures so restrained that every chorister's eyes are fixed on the director - molded performances of supple rapture, tenderness and splendor. The flood of sound

was controlled, with dynamics gauged to exceptional expressive effect. Two excellent tenors, Nathanael Reese and Richard Cragg, provided impassioned solos in movements from Rachmaninoff's "All-Night Vigil."

English is one of the most difficult languages to render clearly, but Gloriam offered a selection of songs of praise in which every word was intelligible. (And the chorus sang from memory throughout the program.) While Samuel Adler's "A Prophecy of Peace" was especially ardent and boisterous, pieces by Percy Whitlock, Ned Rorem, Leo Sowerby and Charles Stanford also received loving treatment.

Gloriam recently released a compact disc - among its four dozen or so recordings - of music by French composer-organist Jean Langlais. Wednesday's program included "Fete," an organ work of bright and moody atmosphere played to the sonic hilt by David Chalmers, and Messe Solennelle.

The latter score goes to extremes of emotion and sonority, with organ colors and choral voices melding on a journey of mystery, anguish and triumph. Gloriam performed it, aptly, to the skies.

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Pops performance uplifting

MUSIC REVIEW By John Zeugner *Telegram & Gazette* Reviewer

Conductor Keith Lockhart opened his comments at the annual Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra's Holiday Concert at the DCU center yesterday with, naturally enough, "The weather outside is frightful." But to the storm-diminished crowd inside (11 empty tables on the floor, 13 only partially-filled, maybe 3,000 in tier seats) things were, in fact, delightful. Lockhart and the Pops operation truly deliver. Their professionalism always carries the day.

Each year Lockhart always manages to find some ingenious way to tread across that vast American-value territory between the secular and the sacred, between all-powerful consumerism, and distantly disturbing crucifixion. This year he gestured in both directions.

For the theologically inclined he added the brilliantly trained, wonderfully precise and convincing choral group, "Gloria Dei Cantores," about 50 voices that know how to articulate and project, and who sing with marvelous gusto. Lockhart worked them ruthlessly, giving them a dominant role in 12 of the 14 offerings.



The Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra plays holiday favorites at the DCU Center yesterday. (T&G Staff/DAN GOULD)

And for spiritual skeptics Lockhart ginned up a mini-orchestral and choral version of the film, "The Polar Express," with actor Patrick Shea doing the narration and stills from the movie projected while the story unfolded. That story only asks us at the end to believe, if we really want to hear the silver bell the little boy receives for his trip to the North Pole. It doesn't specify what we should believe, just that we should believe — maybe in the Church of the Transfiguration, where the Gloria Dei Cantores sings weekly on the Cape, or maybe just in Best Buy.

Between those poles, the Pops machine churned through the Christmas standards with élan — pieces like Anderson's "Sleigh Ride," "Waltz of the Flowers" from the Nutcracker, a Santa medley. The high point came in an absolutely astounding, mesmerizing version of "The Twelve Days of Christmas," in which the choir faultlessly spun out the itemization as the orchestra tossed off a bevy of parodies of classical music warhorse pieces. Beethoven's 5th, for example, for "the fifth day of Christmas my true love gave to me," etc., etc. The pace was dizzying, the execution by chorus and orchestra magically inspired. A good many in the audience stood applauding at the end.

As in past concerts, there was the inevitable recitation of "Twas the Night Before Christmas," using a local narrator. This year, Jean McMurray, executive director of the Worcester County Food Bank, did the honors and turned in an articulate, nicely paced rendering, a carefully blended match with the orchestra.

The concert closed with an audience singalong, in which consumerism easily triumphed. "Rudolph," "Winter Wonderland," "Let it Snow," and "Jingle Bells" closed out prior and forgotten snippets from "The Messiah." The audience stood and cheered, extracting two encores. The final offering had a bit of irony, "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas," since outside the weather was even more frightful. Six to 10 more inches of the white stuff seemed to answer the longing and dreams of the clearly delighted, emerging crowd.