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MUSIC REVIEW

Cape Cod choir breathes new life into vintage set

PAUL BOWEN
SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

The stately and resonant sanctuary of Christ Episcopal Church in Little Rock was the venue Thursday night for an eclectic program of choral pieces from composers of both relatively modern vintage and those lost to antiquity by the beautiful voices of *Gloriae Dei Cantores*.

Gloriae Dei Cantores (Singers to the Glory of God) is a 40-voice choir under the direction of Elizabeth C. Patterson. They are based in the Cape Cod area of Massachusetts and dedicated to the authentic interpretation of sacred choral music spanning a wide range of musical history. Quite a spectrum of that range was presented to an appreciative audience of about 200.

The program was divided into two sections — "The Orthodox Influence: A century of sacred choral masterworks" and "Musical Mystics of the 20th Century."

The singing of "Christe Redemptor" by the Schola component of the choir was proof that the undecorated line can be sung intuitively and with appropriate dynamics. It soon proved to be the common thread of this wonderful performance.

Neither Tchaikovsky nor Rachmaninoff come readily to mind when one considers sacred music. The selections from Tchaikovsky's "Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom" were exceptionally gorgeous due to the consistently delicate dynamic transitions by the singers. Singing softly with breath support is not easy.

Alto soloist N. Karen Catkin was easily the high point Rachmaninoff's "All Night Vigil."

The highlight of the eve-

ning was the "Mass for Double Choir" by the Swiss serialist composer Frank Martin. The singing was both luminous

and propulsive. It was a perfect approach to a piece that borrowed from the ancients and the moderns.

'Creation' singers light up stage

By ANNA CREBO
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

HYANNIS - Few works of art can match Franz Joseph Haydn's "The Creation" in evoking a vivid awareness of the sublime manifesting in nature.

Concert REVIEW

The crowning achievement of his later years, the great oratorio - several years in the writing - caused a sensation at its long-awaited public premiere in 1799 at Vienna's Burgtheater, and its fame soon spread rapidly throughout Europe and beyond.

Although it is not performed as regularly as, let's say, Handel's "Messiah" (one of Haydn's main sources of inspiration), "The Creation" continues to maintain its place in the musical firmament as one of the great choral works of all time.

Certainly, Saturday night's audience at Barnstable High School Performing Arts Center seemed to bask in the glow of Haydn's resplendent choruses, tastefully virtuosic arias, and colorful, ingeniously crafted orchestral depictions of the seven "Days" of Creation, narrated in Old Testament-based recitatives by three archangel soloists. Permeating all was the irrepressibly joyous, but intensely devout, spirit of Papa Haydn.

Sounding as one radiant, multifaceted voice, the singers lit up the auditorium with their fervor and expert delivery. Using no scores, they made the most of their direct communication with the audience.

Nowhere was that spirit more effectively projected than in the superb choral work by *Gloriae Dei Cantores*, the stellar professional chorus affiliated with Orleans' Community of Jesus.

Sounding as one radiant, multifaceted voice, the singers lit up the auditorium with their fervor and expert delivery. Using no scores, they made the most of their direct communication with the audience. We all sat up a little straighter and faced the music - gladly.

Both as the archangel Gabriel and later as Eve in the Garden of Eden, soprano Kristen Watson charmed with the fluidity and bell-like quality of her voice, which, because it was so naturally and accurately placed, transcended the limitations of the auditorium's acoustics. Her key arias, "With verdure clad" and "On mighty pens" - delightfully ornamented tributes to the plant and bird kingdoms, respectively - were

elegantly phrased; and her Part 3 love duets with Adam (baritone Thomas Jones) constituted some of the most delectable moments of the evening.

An engaging, dramatic presence and possessing fine diction, Jones proved an astute choice for the pivotal role of Raphael, who often narrated (in recitative) the appearance of the more elemental as well as animal aspects of creation as depicted by the orchestra - from "foaming billows" and "dreary wasteful hail" to the "great whale," and, eventually, from "swarms of insects" down to the "sinuous...worm." - sung softly on a very low D.

Although initially Jones misjudged the acoustic and failed to project adequately, by Part 2 he was singing with more gusto and fuller voice.

Tenor William Hite, a longtime favorite of Boston audiences, was satisfying vocally as the heraldic archangel Uriel, but his delivery was a bit too

IN CONCERT

WHAT: Cape Cod Symphony Orchestra, with *Gloriae Dei Cantores* and three soloists

WHEN: Saturday night and Sunday afternoon

WHERE: Barnstable High School Performing Arts Center, West Main St., Hyannis

restrained and his manner too aloof.

Maestro Jung-Ho Pak led the combined ensembles of Cape Cod Symphony Orchestra and *Gloriae Dei Cantores* with deftness and spirit, trying valiantly to keep a reasonable balance, especially between orchestra and soloists, who, although placed well to the front of the stage, were at a disadvantage because of the hall's inherent acoustics.

Haydn's magnificent orchestral scoring, except for some occasional wayward (and out-of-tune) meanderings in the violins, was basically well served by the Cape players. Paring down and refining tone qualities, particularly in the woodwinds and brass, would help but probably not solve the balance problem with soloists.

The Dallas Morning News

Classical music review:

Gloriae Dei Cantores presents an admirable program at Cathedral Shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe

Monday, October 19, 2009

By SCOTT CANTRELL / The Dallas Morning News

Cape Cod, Mass., wouldn't immediately come to mind as a hotbed of high-level choral singing. But the choir known as *Gloriae Dei Cantores* (Singers to the Glory of God), which is based at the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, has toured internationally and recorded two dozen CDs.

As part of a 10-city U.S. tour, the group performed Sunday evening at the Cathedral Shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe. And there was much to admire in a program of Russian music, three motets by the Englishman Edmund Rubbra and the glorious Mass for Double Choir by the Swiss composer Frank Martin.

Led with strikingly minimal gestures by Elizabeth Patterson, the 36-voice group sang with firm tone, a wide dynamic range, lovely legato lines and generous expressivity. The cathedral provided a richly reverberant acoustic, the closest in the area to the great European cathedrals for which so much major choral music was conceived.

The chorus was at its considerable best in the Martin, one of the greatest 20th-century settings of the Latin mass. Voice parts lapped gently at the beginnings of the Gloria and Sanctus, but climaxes stirred up thrilling masses of sound. In a spectacularly unfortunate mistiming, though, the adjacent AT&T Performing Arts Center set off loud fireworks during the Benedictus and Agnus Dei. Groan.

This was a concert with its share of bad luck. Parents with babies and very young children who couldn't keep quiet wandered in and out from the all-day Arts District Celebration. The minute organist James Jordan started to play the Bach C-major Toccata, half the audience stood up and started talking.

After two warmly molded movements from Tchaikovsky's *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, the choir's intonation drifted in two movements from Rachmaninoff's *All-Night Vigil*. And neither the six-movement *Ineffable Mystery* by Russian composer Georgy Sviridov nor three Tenebrae motets by Rubbra struck me as music of great interest. The Rubbra's odd progressions also needed more absolutely precise tuning.