
Salt Lake Choral Artists plays with full body and soul

By Celia R. Baker

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The theme for this year's season of the Salt Lake Choral Artists is "Imagine," and at Saturday night's concert, the audience was asked to imagine a time-traveling road trip across America. A good community choir -- and SLCA is one -- bears commonality with the American ideal at its most idealistic. Many disparate voices each take a role in creating a harmonious whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This happened as it should under the baton of Brady Allred, giving a symbolic resonance to an all-American evening.

SLCA comprises three choirs -- a large concert choir, small chamber choir and a women's choir. Each got a chance to shine during the evening, and the choirs combined for several selections. Music of iconic American composers such as Aaron Copland, Howard Hanson and Randall Thompson was sung with full-bodied fervor, but some of the evening's choicest moments came when the choirs delved into lesser-known and newer areas of the American choral repertoire. Carol Barnett's "Gloria" from "The World Beloves: A Bluegrass Mass" was intriguing, but would have benefited from a banjo to go along with the fiddle, guitar and bass played by Jessica Lee, Rob Gardner and Adam Piper, respectively.

The fine trumpet playing of Alan Sedgley provided a foil for shimmering choral harmonies during Walt Whitman's "Song of the Open Road," as set to music by Norman Dello Joio. The excellent diction of the concert choir allowed Whitman's vision of road-trip utopia to be heard and understood.

Allred draws a rich, full-bodied sound from the choral artists and the chamber choir drawn from its membership. The music was well-prepared and performed with precision and enthusiasm throughout the evening, although the audience experience could be improved if singers raised their faces from their music more often.

Pianist Laurel Henderson Enke provided expert piano accompaniment for most selections. Her sensitivity and caressing tone are valuable assets to the choirs.

The SLCA women's choir, conducted by Jane Fjelsted, sings with a great deal of heart, and achieved a fine choral blend during a toe-tapping rendition of "Mr. Sandman," as arranged by Ed Lojeski. Fjelsted's own a cappella arrangement of "How Can I Keep From Singing" was another winner.

The chamber choir provided one of the concert's nicest surprises -- dusty old Stephen Foster tunes updated through cool jazz arrangements by Rhonda Sandberg. "Camptown Races" and "Oh! Susannah" never sounded so classy.

Such a trip would be incomplete without African-American spirituals. "Daniel, Daniel" was the standout there. Wildly creative versions of western folk music arranged by John David Earnest and a stirring version of "America the Beautiful" capped the evening.

Review

Bottom line » Ideally American choir resonates stirring tones and melodies.

What » Salt Lake Choral Artists' "Made in America."

When » Oct. 17 at Libby Gardner Hall, University of Utah campus.

Info » www.saltlakechoralartists.org.