

Salt Lake Choral Artists Christmas concert delights

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SALT LAKE CHORAL ARTISTS, Libby Gardner Concert Hall, Dec. 19

For their annual holiday concert, the Salt Lake Choral Artists performed a varied program that traveled far and wide — from Russia to Italy, England and Argentina. Needless to say it featured a wide range of styles, but under music director Brady Allred, that's certainly no problem for SLCA. They can do it all because they're a versatile group that has the talent and professionalism to pull it off convincingly.

Allred knows how to get the best out of his voices, and at Saturday's concert the ensemble performed with polish, crisp articulation and nuance.

Not one to shy away from works that aren't in the standard repertoire or by composers who are unknown to most concertgoers, Allred programmed a wonderfully rewarding concert that reached out to the sold-out audience in Libby Gardner Concert Hall.

While not strictly a Christmas work, Sergei Rachmaninof's "All-Night Vigil" still fit in nicely and SLCA opened the program with three movements from the work. The choir sang it with full sonority that captured the deep rounded tones of the Russian language and the richness of the harmonies. It was wonderfully articulated, and Allred paid a great deal of attention to minute details that made the pieces come alive.

The choir followed with Ottorino Respighi's "Laud to the Nativity," one of the composer's most melodic and sunny works. They sang with beautifully crafted and richly toned phrasings, mirrored in the singing of the three soloists (soprano Carol Ann Allred; mezzo-soprano Laura Garff Lewis; tenor Todd Miller). The three, in turn, brought wonderful lyricism and expressiveness to their parts.

The choir and soloists were accompanied by a small ensemble of woodwinds and piano four hands, and Brady Allred's direction captured the joy and vibrancy of the work compellingly.

Ariel Ramirez is one of those composers who is fairly unknown outside his native Argentina. His delightful "Navidad Nuestra" was on the second half and was a charming companion piece to the works by European composers on the program.

Employing the folk traditions of his country, the work is irresistible and the choir, accompanied by various percussion instruments, gave a robust account that was rhythmically exuberant but

also lyrical. Miller and baritone Gary Sorenson were the soloists and sang with feeling and passion.

No Christmas concert today seems to be complete without the music of John Rutter, and SLCA performed two sets of his pieces. The women's choir, under the direction of Jane Fjeldsted, did a wonderful job with "Dancing Day." Their singing was fluid, lyrical and nuanced.

The concert closed with Rutter's "Carols from Cambridge," one of his best known works and which includes the popular "Shepherd's Pipe Carol" and "Angel's Carol." Under Allred, the full choir, with woodwinds, harp and piano, sang these infectious pieces with lyricism and finely molded expressiveness.

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