

The Gift That Keeps On Giving

Greenwich Choral Society Presents Commissioned Work – A Tribute to Love

The Greenwich Choral Society's December Concert at the Christ Church in Greenwich was centered on an extremely creative gift.

Anne Marie Hynes, who has been singing with the GCS for 30 years, commissioned a significant choral work as a gift to her husband to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. It was a gift that Hynes gave to the GCS – and to us as well.

The three movement work, called “Always and Forevermore,” was written by Greenwich resident Rob Mathes. Mathes is an acclaimed producer, arranger and composer who has worked with artists such as Sting, Carly Simon and Vanessa Williams.

The first movement, called “May’s Bright Morning,” was spirited music for chorus centered firmly in G major. The text, also written by Mathes, spoke of “searching” and “wandering” until that time when “I would turn a corner and you would be mine.” The music merged an Irish reel into a fabric of diatonic lyricism.

This was followed by an expressive love song for baritone solo and chorus, “With One Long Kiss.”

The text, merged from poems by Sara Teasdale and J. M. Synge, compared the kiss of heaven and the kiss of rain with your kiss. The slowly unfolding harmonic structure was an attractive support for baritone Jonathan Estabrooks, who sang expressively with warm vocal colors.

The third movement, “Love, Love, Let us be Always Together,” had a theatrical elegance and built to an expansive chorus that created an impressive sense of culmination for the work.

The overall program was designed by Conductor Paul F. Mueller around four larger works with holiday hymns and carols between them. As always in a GCS holiday program, there was a candlelight processional with ringing handbells. When the chorus had encircled the church, they opened the concert with “A Boy Was Born,” by Benjamin Britten. The last bit of daylight was coming through the stained glass windows as the chorus sang. It doesn’t get better!

“In Terra Pax” by composer Gerald Finzi was the first longer work on the program. It set the narrative style of this event with attractive orchestral playing. Estabrooks sang the outer framing of this cantata-like work, and soprano soloist Kerri Marcinko, who had convincing dramatic power as the Angel described by St. Luke, also showed she was able to sing with simple expression when the music called for tenderness.

Ralph Vaughn Williams’ “Benedicite” had effective moments, but the tempo seemed slow and had a tendency to slow even more as the work progressed.

The central John Austin poem, with its choral responses to Marcinko’s arcing phrases, was the highlight of this performance.

The evening closed with a Christmas Cantata called “Christus Natus Est,” by Cecilia McDowall. This collection of five carols featured a small but very effective children’s choir from several Greenwich Schools who were prepared by Phyllis Dale. The John Rutter arrangement of the carol “I Saw Three Ships” ended the event in high spirits, with a verse where all the men in the audience were asked to sing the famous tune, and in the next verse all the women of the audience were asked to sing on the syllable “La.” Even seasoned members of the chorus could be seen smiling at those sounds. As usual for GCS, this was a holiday event that was both engaging and entertaining.

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