

Perfect setting for impeccable choir

By MARY KUNZ GOLDMAN

NEWS CLASSICAL MUSIC CRITIC

The singers of the Vocalis Chamber Choir are raising their voices this weekend for two a capella concerts. The first took place Saturday night in the Karpeles Manuscript Museum on North Street. It repeats at 3 p.m. today in Baker Memorial United Methodist Church, East Aurora.

The choir, led by director James Burritt, runs the gamut from a modern, tongue-in-cheek version of "The Twelve Days of Christmas" to a stark 13th century medieval hymn, "Angelus ad virginem." There were also a couple of Lesson

CONCERT REVIEW

Vocalis Chamber Choir

Saturday night in the Karpeles Manuscript Museum. Another performance at 3 p.m. today in Baker Memorial United Methodist Church, 345 Main St., East Aurora. For more information, visit www.vocalischamberchoir.org.

and Carols standards like "The Lamb," by John Tavener, and "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

Vocalis' voices are incredible and beautifully balanced. Their phrasing is so exquisitely sculpted as to sound seamless. The Karpeles Manuscript Museum was a gorgeous place to hear them. Nine poinsettias

were arrayed behind the singers, with gold votive candles in between. Long strips of shimmering white curtains conveyed the ethereal, and an elegant and generous Christmas tree made for an unforgettable tableau.

Above, in this graceful E.B. Green-designed building, were skylights in graceful arts-and-crafts designs. What a setting.

And at intermission there was spiced wine and hot cider, and cookies, and foil-wrapped chocolates scattered on the tables. It is no wonder intermission lasted half an hour.

This choir is impeccably rehearsed, and the singers all sound completely in tune with each other, in every sense of the word.

"In the Bleak Mid-Winter," Karen D'Angelo did a stunning job with the soprano solo part, while in the background her colleagues in the choir pulled off otherworldly effects. Sometimes the sound was warm and caressing, and at other times it was like the whistle of the wind. It was haunting.

Soprano Lydia Evans was the soloist for "Lully, Lulla, Thou Little Tiny Child." This wasn't the version you expect; it was by the 20th century composer Kenneth Leighton. Evans' bell-like tones were glorious against the other singers' gentle backdrop.

A John Rutter arrangement of "Silent Night" was otherworldly, with its awestruck, gently rocking vocal accompaniment. This was a highlight of the night.

But gems like "Ding Dong Merrily on High" and "Deck the Hall" were such fun, and tossed off so deftly and gracefully. The various verses were different, with subtle shifts of color and volume.

The 20-singer choir gets points not only for scholarship but for imagination. A delightful 17th century Italian carol was followed by a 20th century Hungarian take on "Ave maris stella" that was reverent and heavenly. Tomas Luis de Victoria's "O magnum mysterium" was very moving. And, Alfonso X de Castille's "Rosa das rosas" was a happy curiosity.

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