

December 14, 2012

[St Mary Schola explores music of Advent](#)

By CHRISTOPHER HYDE

This Christmas season, the StMarySchola is concentrating on medieval, renaissance and baroque music celebrating the Advent.

CONCERT REVIEW

THE ST MARY SCHOLA

WHERE: Cathedral Church of St. Luke, Portland

WHEN: Dec. 11

The a cappella singers, under Bruce Fithian, who also sings tenor and doubles on the organ, have put together an intriguing program exploring Mary's reactions to the events preceding the nativity, ranging from the introspective "Oeffne dich" aria from Bach's Cantata 61, sung by Molly Harmon, to a powerful "Magnificat" of Claudia Monteverdi (1567-1643).

Many of the works were accompanied by members of a chamber orchestra consisting of violin, viola, cello, oboe, recorder and organ. They were interspersed with appropriate readings from the King James Bible and poetry on the subject of the Advent.

The evening began with a 15th-century Glasgow men's processional, "Nova, Nova," based on a pun: "Nova, nova, 'Ave' fit ex Eva." ("News, news, 'Ave' made from Eve.") The ethereal women's processional, "Flos Regalis" (Royal Flower) from the 14th century, was more delicate and respectful.

The program contained three works by Heinrich Schutz (1532-1594), a predecessor of Bach and his equal in polyphony and dramatic musical settings of biblical stories.

His "Joseph du Sohn David," in which an angel appears to Joseph to explain what's going on, is a masterpiece in which the angel has a single voice composed of two sopranos, Erin Chenard and Andrea Graichen, a bass, Bruce Canterbury, plus cello, played by Elliott Cherry, and organ by Bruce Fithian. The combination gives the angelic voice irrefutable power and range.

His "Glory to God in the highest" from "The Christmas Story" was impressive in its stepwise ascension to the final phrase "good will toward men."

The second half of the program included a tenor aria from "Meine Seele ruhmt and preist" ("My soul extols and praises") from Cantata 189, long thought to be a work by Bach, but actually composed by G.M. Hoffman. If the aria is any indication, the confusion was warranted. It sounds like Bach at the height of his powers. Tenor Martin Lescault, accompanied by the full orchestra, executed it

powerfully. Lescault has mastered the rare ability to incorporate baroque ornamentation seamlessly into the melodic line.

Claudio Monteverdi's "Magnificat" with full chorus and orchestra, provided a glorious end to the concert, especially in the "Fecit potentiam" section, where the composer uses the "strength of his arm" theme as a powerful, rhythmical refrain to an enumeration of God's blessings. It ended with a Gloria sung by Fithian and Lescault, followed by an immense tutti on "Sicut erat in pricipio" ("As it was in the beginning ...").

The program will be repeated at 4 p.m. Sunday at the Episcopal Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Falmouth. Tickets may be purchased at the door or at www.stmaryschola.org.

Christopher Hyde's Classical Beat column appears in the Maine Sunday Telegram. He can be reached at:

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