

Chicago Chorale April 12, 2006 Hyde Park Herald

Some works of art transcend time and place: Shakespeare's plays, Michelangelo's sculptures, Hokkaido's drawings. Bach's "Mass in B Minor" is one such particular piece of art. It is a massive masterwork by a creator of so very many master works. Hyde parkers were treated to a marvelous rendition Saturday night in historic Rockefeller Chapel. Bruce Tammen brought his Chicago Chorale to Rockefeller in order to give life to this, one of Bach's greatest achievements.

Tammen took a chance and placed both the choir and orchestra in the loft situated high above and far back from the altar. This meant that the vast majority of the audience had their backs to the performers. Even so, it was a triumph, as the sound from on high really is markedly superior to that which is projected from the apse. Stuffing some 25 instrumentalists and 50-odd singers in that small space must surely have been a challenge, but the result was that Bach's wonder and majesty drifted down to the pews as if delivered by angels. The quality of the sound was simply magnificent, and Tammen's chorus was angelic itself as the singers applied themselves to this exalted music.

They were supple in the complex runs and displayed authoritative dignity in the chorales. The Chicago Chorale singers are known for their elegant phrasing and careful attention to diction, and they were up to their usual impeccable standards Saturday night.

They also fielded a set of stalwart soloists. My favorite was tenor John Concepcion, whose approach was direct and natural. Particularly attractive was the "Benedictus," a charming duet for tenor and flute.

Everything about this performance was top-notch, right down to the superb essay in the program, penned by Chicago Chorale member Justin Flossi. Save your program just for this, if you still have it. Some people didn't even get a program, as the house was packed well beyond expectations. This included a large number of folks sitting on chairs in the very front of the chapel, facing the loft. It is heartening to know that Hyde Park knows how to support local groups. The Chicago Chorale audience was significantly larger than that for the world-renowned Tallis Scholars who sang in this same space only eight days earlier. But the approval of listeners, via the emphatic foot stomping, was markedly similar.

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