

## *A golden oldie in the age of the Internet*

by M.L. Rantala

**T**his is the time of year when you are bathed in holiday music, often whether you want it or not. The old Christmas tunes come tumbling at you from all directions in stores and restaurants, gas stations and dry cleaners. But some of the truly old Christmas music worth hearing isn't piped into shopping malls. Bach's Christmas Oratorio is grand holiday entertainment and Bruce Tammen proved it yet again this past weekend in Hyde Park.

Tammen led the Chicago Chorale and the Metropolis Symphony Orchestra (formerly Symphony of the Shores) in a performance of this 1734 work (BWV 248) at Hyde Park's Church of Saint Paul and the Redeemer Sunday night.

Tambra Black stood out among the soloists, with her warm voice, rich in natural beauty. She caressed the long-held notes and found both the dignity and the joy in the music. One of the highlights of the performance was "Schliesse, mein Herze," with Black's nicely shaped aria wonderfully accompanied by concertmaster Jeri-Lou Zike and cellist Chase Morrison.

Bass William Bennett sang with substance and conviction. Tenor Jordan Samuels, who has an unaffected naturalness, performed with clarity. Soprano Rebecca Prescott sang the Angel Recitative with strength, and Amanda Alò brought a pleasing lightness to her duet with Bennett.

The Chorale offered ringing sound full of warmth and definition. The opening chorus, "Jauchzet, frohlocket!," set the tone for the performance. Their full sound was joyful and their enunciation accurate. The chorale "Brich an, o schönes Morgenlicht"

was muscular, and the chorus "Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe" had stylish motion.

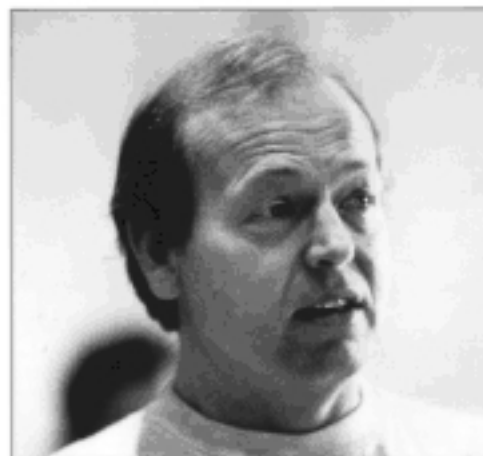
The small orchestra navigated the score with ease and grace. The timpani was resonant, the trumpets shiny and the bass smooth and mellow. Tammen expertly led the musicians in a thoroughly enjoyable, well-paced performance.

Tammen was spiffing in his tie and tails, but the ladies were the fashion leaders. Concertmaster Zike was stunning in a sleeveless, floor-length black

dress, what fashionistas deem a body-conscious gown, with a simple white stripe running from the mock turtleneck to the hem. Soloist Black was in black: a velvet dress to the floor with a shorter jacket, both highlighted with lovely dark beading. Her dangly, beady earrings were perfect accessories.

Perhaps the reason that the Chicago Chorale displayed such confidence was that they had had a chance to test their performance out six days earlier in, of all places, Mexico City. In yet another one of those odd but cheering stories of how the internet links people who surely would never have come together without it, this small Hyde Park-based group found themselves invited to perform south of the border because the conductor of the Orquesta del Nuevo Mundo knows how to surf the web. He also had a problem: the choir he

### music review



Bruce Tammen



Some members of the Hyde Park-based Chicago Chorale.

had hired to perform with him pulled out just two months before the performance date. Johannes Ullrich plugged "Bach" and "Christmas Oratorio" into his search engine and the Chorale's modest website was one of hundreds of the search results. The Chorale became Ullrich's first choice to perform in Mexico City's German Centre, and after hectic arrangements, they made their Mexican debut on Dec. 9.

If you want to see the Little Website That Could, or to learn more about the Chicago Chorale, check out [www.chicagochorale.org](http://www.chicagochorale.org).