

Choral groups combine for a greater impact

Choir director brings performers from New Jersey for Connecticut show

By Gilbert Mott CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Eric Dale Knapp is a busy conductor, holding several music director positions in this country and abroad. He got a chance to combine two of those duties last Saturday, bringing his New Jersey Choral Society to Danbury's First Congregational Church for a concert with his Connecticut Choral Society.

The program centered on two masses by Austrian composer Franz Joseph Haydn.

The Connecticut group led off with the "Little Organ Mass," one of Haydn's short masses. The chorus captured the dramatic mood from the opening "Kyrie," using good command of the language to articulate musical phrases. The "Gloria" had good dynamic contrast and an affectingly soft closing "amen."

The contrapuntal voices of the "Credo" were well set out, with details like the basses' descending "crucifixus" sensitively rendered.

The largest section in this mass is the "Benedictus" for solo soprano, with a prominent part for organ, which gives the mass its name. Teresa Perrotta sang sweetly, if a bit short on support for long phrases.

Linda Sweetman-Waters was the able organist, here and throughout the program. After an "Osanna" that started roughly, the "Dona nobis" was peaceful and secure.

The combined New Jersey and Connecticut forces sang the rest of the way, filling the altar area and stationed in both balconies as well.

This arrangement paid off right away in Felix Mendelssohn's "Heilig." Knapp took a brisk tempo and the piece's layered entrances of voices came across well in the antiphonal arrangement.

The major work was Haydn's "Heiligmesse," one of the great late masses he wrote for his longtime employers at the court of Esterhazy.

The larger forces meant that long lines were sustained better, while fugal voices were still well articulated. The choirs produced a warm, rounded sound, with added heft that punched up the dramatic passages well.

Both groups are clearly well trained and followed their conductor well.

Joining Perrotta for the solo quartet in the "Gloria" were the mezzo Alicia Luick, the tenor John Pickle and the baritone Keith Harris, who all blended well and shaped phrases sensitively.

With any mass in its full form, the "Credo" offers a lot of language for the composer to set and the singers to get through. The choir's attention to detail and nuance kept it going smoothly.

The soprano Lori Elway and baritone Andrew Klein joined other soloists for the male and female trios in the "et incarnatus." The chorus' "et vitam venturae" had a nice dancing lilt in its triple meter.

The "Benedictus" of this mass is notable as well and the choirs delivered a good piano sound that conveyed the sense of mystery that suffuses the piece. Long lines were sustained nicely – only the very highest pitched phrases tended to get away from them.

The concert ended with Ralph Vaughan Williams' brief "Antiphon," a good showpiece for the ensemble, which sang it with a bright sound, full of joy.