

# Local Chorale Group Pleases In Performance of Ives' Work

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Last spring a new singing organization, The Rogue Valley Chorale, was launched and the first concert of the group brought the hope that it would fill a long-felt need and become a major influence in serious music for this area. With the Chorale's second concert, last night in First Christian Church, this hope was materially strengthened. The program was a strong one — rich musically but with lighter, lively moments, and the good-sized audience received it with real pleasure and enthusiasm.

Lynn Sjolund, who has had a far-reaching and good influence on music here since joining the Medford school system in 1956, fortunately continues as director of the Chorale. About 45 singers from all parts of the Rogue Valley made up the initial group, and it now numbers almost 70 voices. These beautifully blended voices produced some fine choral work last night and there is ever reason to believe that they will sound even better in the future.

Last night's program featured two unusually interesting compositions, "Hymn to St. Cecilia" by Benjamin Britten, called Great Britain's finest modern composer, and the seldom-heard "A Centennial Commemoration" by Charles Ives.

W. H. Auden, close friend and collaborator of Britten, wrote the text for this hymn to the goddess of music, and the poem is in itself a work of art. The music is complex and intricate, and deeply moving to many. It is extremely difficult to sing, but the fledgling chorus performed ably and at the reception which followed the concert there was much favorable conversation concerning this part of the program.

Soloists for this were Deborah and Ron McUne and Doris Sjolund, Medford; Daniel Johnson, Eagle Point, and Berna Telford, Grants Pass.

Charles Ives, an American whose compositions are relatively unknown because his musical ideas, with dissonances and polytonalities, were ahead of their time, is now more and more appreciated. Of the four parts in the "Centennial Commemoration," the Easter Carol

written in 1895 is the most compelling. The joyous, soaring opening leads into a somber strain, and then returns to the note of joy which Christians associate with the Easter theme. Formed into a quartet for this were Karen Paschke, Terressa Roberts, John Rowan and George McUne.

Worthy of note are the "Psalm 67" and "Psalm 90" in this group. The first is an example of bi-tonal composing, with the men singing in the key of G minor and the women's parts written in C major. This innovation took some extra concentration on the part of the chorus members in the beginning. "Psalm 90" is another complex, strange piece of music with considerable stridency. All in all, Ives' music is not music which one can ignore — it commands attention, and those who welcome wider horizons in music are eager to hear more Ives.

Six folk songs arranged by Robert deCormier brought the program to a most satisfying conclusion. "Suliram" is a lovely, tender Indonesian cradle song and it was beautifully presented. A sad American folk tune, "Wayfaring Stranger," was also very well received and for this Craig Schmele of Eagle Point, who left the ranks of the chorus to perform on his guitar, can take part of the credit.

Also a part of this group were the lively Italian number, "Bella Bimba" and a Canadian song, "A La Claire Fontaine." When it came to "Who Killed Cock Robin," the singers quite outdid themselves on this completely delightful English tune. And it was a "let yourself go" effort on the American spiritual "Free My Lord, Free at Las'." It was joyous music, sung with joy and abandon and brought sustained applause from the audience.

Opening numbers were "Deutsches Magnificat" by Heinrich Schutz, and three Brahms choruses.

Greg Smith, pianist and organist, is a most able accompanist for the Rogue Valley Chorale. Last night, his organ playing for the Ives works was especially good, adding considerably to the impact of these.

This program will be repeated Monday, November 25, in First Baptist Church, Seventh and C Streets, Grants Pass. For those unable to attend last night's performance, it would be well worth a trip to the neighboring city to attend. It is welcome news that this excellent singing group will begin rehearsals in January for a spring program.