

Chorale offers fine performance

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By MARY ANN CAMPBELL

Mail Tribune Staff Writer

The Rogue Valley Chorale can be counted on to produce an evening of professionally performed music that is not often heard, as this chorus of

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fine singers did again Tuesday evening in the Southern Oregon State College recital hall, Ashland, directed by Lynn Sjolund.

The concert will be repeated Thursday at 8 p.m. in Medford Senior High School auditorium.

In honor of the bicenten-

nial, all but one of the composers represented in the program are American. These include William Billings (1746-1800), Samuel Barber (1910-) and the unknown musicians who gave us the Negro spirituals.

The major work performed was the Mass in G minor with double chorus by the English composer Vaughn Williams. Soloists were Kathy Gordon, soprano; Doris Sjolund, alto; Deane Tack, tenor, and Brian Tingle, bass.

The mass is appealing to choruses because it is sung a capella, unlike more familiar masses, which require instrument accompaniment. Sjolund obtains a blending of voices that resembles the sounds of an organ from his singers. Especially impressive were the minor chords that yet provide a touch of hope in the Miserere, and the beautiful cadences of the Missa Solemnis. The four soloists provided dramatic emphasis, with a trill by Mrs. Sjolund and a passage reminiscent of the music of the synagogue by Tingle.

The concert opened with four songs by Billings, who was a contemporary of Paul Revere. He and Revere were nine miles from Boston in Watertown, Mass., when the British besieged the city. His "Lamentation over Boston," the third song in his group, paraphrases Babylon in the Biblical text, "Boston, my dear town." His most effective works in this particular group, were the "Easter Anthem," in which the voices are used in chord progressions, with dissonances that are unusual for Billings' period. In "David's Lamentation," probably the most impressive of the four songs, the bass passages, crying for "my son," movingly describe the death of the baby.

Samuel Barber's "Reincarnations" are four poems by James Stephens set to music, bringing to the imagination of the audience Mary Hines, a joyous expression in counterpoint and harmony of the charms of a lovely girl, whose key word is "airily," and Anthony O'Daly, whose death is mourned in a strong, vigorous melody, ending with a cry of "grief," on a long minor chord. The third Barber song is "The Coolin," a romantic ballad with an Irish quality to the melody.

The final group of songs, the Negro spirituals, were the least successful, not because of any technical lack, but because, in this lily-white, sun-downer valley, there is no opportunity to experience black culture, so the spirituals sound like white folks singing about black folks they don't know or understand. The clear, pure voices of the chorale fail to convey the intense sorrow and aloneness of

the mournful songs, and, although musically successful, there is no emotional comprehension of the subject matter.

Soloists for the spirituals were Karen Foster in "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," Dave Franklyn in "There is a Balm in Gilead," and William Matthews in "I Got a Key." All sang beautifully and elegantly, but the basic quality of these songs is not elegance. Rather, they express despair.

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