

Splendid program winds up Rogue Valley Chorale series

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A splendid program Monday night at Medford Congregational Church brought the spring concert series of Rogue Valley Chorale to a close. This was the third performance of

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the series, the first having been given at First Baptist Church, Grants Pass, April 19 and the second in the Southern Oregon State College Recital Hall, Ashland, April 21.

Monday night's concert brought an overflow audience of more than 300 to the church to hear numbers ranging from a Bach cantata to familiar Irish folk songs. The 80-voice Chorale, directed by Lynn Sjolund, shared the program with a 15-member SOSC Brass Choir, and was supported by a small string ensemble. Marvin Belford, chairman of the SOSC Music Department, directs the Brass group.

J. S. Bach, himself a church organist and music director, left a legacy of some of the most beautiful sacred music ever written and his "Christ lag in Todesbanden" (Christ lay in Bonds of Death) which opened the program is a fine example of his cantata works. Known as the Cantata No. 4, the text is a seven-stanza hymn by Luther and various combinations of the voices are used for some of the verses, and the full chorus for others.

Director Sjolund and his Chorale gave a truly excellent moving performance —

those 80 blended voices produce a rich stirring sound. The prolonged applause set the tone of the evening.

For the Brass Choir's four numbers, Director Belford used various combinations of instruments grouped not only in front of the audience but in the two rear corners of the auditorium. Played were two rather heavy and ornate works by Gabrieli, the eminent Italian organist who lived some four centuries ago, "Canzon Duodecimi Toni" and "Sonata Octavi Toni, both double choir. The remaining two were "Laudate Dominum Tympanis" a melodious Palestrina composition, and the "Alleluia" of Gallus (Handl) both played in triple choir effect.

The audience was especially interested in Belford's grouping and re-grouping of the musicians and if there was any doubt that so much brass sound could be pleasing, it was dispelled by the warmth and extent of the applause.

Most impressive music of the evening was the Chorale's performance of "Saul," a composition by the modern Swedish composer, Hovland. This intensely emotional and dramatic work uses the choir voices in murmured and whispered effects, as well as the traditional singing. Over and over there is the question "Why Do You Persecute Me?" Why? Why? Why? and the name "Saul" is repeated over and over, in muted tones — the entire piece builds to great dramatic tension.

Director Sjolund says that this truly unusual music must be rehearsed with extreme care to achieve full richness without risking emotional excesses. John Shuford was narrator.

The Chorale and the Brass Choir were then combined for "Fanfare For a Festival" by Nelson and two Gabrieli numbers which were performed with outstanding results. "In Ecclesiis" and "Jubilate Deo" are described as sacred symphonies — the first is notable for beautiful, soaring harmonies and the second is a triumphant, thrilling composition. Director Sjolund knows precisely how to combine the voices, the strings and the brasses — the last well disciplined by Mr. Belford's training — into a creation of beauty. Soloists for "In Ecclesiis" were Sharyl Lonstron, soprano, and David Franklin, tenor.

The Irish Folk Songs were a refreshing contrast to the noble music which preceded, and they were performed with relish and style. William Matthews was tenor soloist for "Wearin' of the Green" and Mary Kay Harmon, soprano soloist for "Silent, O Moyle, Be the Roar."

Beverly Kirkpatrick is both the concert and rehearsal accompanist for the Chorale, and last night Jan Baordman, Chorale member and organist, was at the organ for "Saul." The string ensemble is made up of Marilyn Hutchins and Judy Erikson, violinists; Lindell Yeaw and

Jane Dungey, violists, and Judy Bjorlie, cellist.

The Chorale membership represents Grants Pass, Medford and Ashland singers and the assisting musicians are also from various towns and cities in the Rogue Valley. The Chorale programs are a most worthy addition to the cultural life of Southern Oregon. And we compliment the women for the beauty and discreet good taste of their blue gowns.

In assessing the evening, one must reluctantly conclude that both the audience and the musicians overflowed the building. Where to hold such events is a continuing problem concerning everyone. Medford Congregational Church is a gem as far as acoustics are concerned but it is not a large building and it was really too small for last night's program. The music, beautiful, and satisfying though it most certainly was, suffered from being too confined; the musicians were hampered in their movement and performance.

In the meantime, Lynn Sjolund, Marvin Belford and all the rest deserve our heartiest gratitude and we look forward to hearing them in the fall concerts.