

# Chorale combines fun and education

## Program strikes a Western tune

**T**he Rogue Valley Chorale is winding up its 1998-99 season with a wide-ranging tribute to the West.

It offers a musical journey from Hiawatha to the Red River Valley, and from the creativity of Aaron

Copland to the familiar sounds of "Home on the Range."

And it features an unusually large number of soloists and instrumental accompanists.

The program called "How the West was Sung (The Chorale at the Corral)" was presented Saturday night at the Craterian Ginger Rogers Theater in Medford. It repeats at the same location today, and tickets are still available.

Under the direction of Chorale founder Lynn Sjolund, it's an enjoyable concert as well as an education, just under two hours in length.

The most serious work comes up first, "Hiawatha's Wedding Feast," with text from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem published in 1855 and music by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor composed in 1898.

Coleridge-Taylor also wrote "The Death of Minnehaha" and "Hiawatha's Farewell." All three were often performed together under the title of "Scenes From the Songs of Hiawatha," and that work was one of the most popular in Victorian England, surpassed only by Handel's "Messiah."

Coleridge-Taylor was born in 1875 to an English mother and African father and became intensely interested in civil rights issues in the United States.

As performed by the Chorale, "Hiawatha's Wedding Feast" is an interesting, often majestic work, with piano accompaniment by Andrea Brock and a nice solo by tenor Rex White.

Concluding the first part of the concert are three selections from Aaron Copland's "The Tender Land."

The last of Copland's Americana works, the opera tells of life on a farm during the Depressions, young love and the bonds of family.

It was commissioned for television in 1954 but was rejected by the networks, and eventually premiered at the New York City Opera.

Soprano Kathy Gordon sings "Laurie's Song," with Doris Sjolund at the piano.

The full Chorale, about 75 voices for this event, presents the joyous "The Promise of Living" and then the rousing, toe-tapping "Stomp Your Foot."

Both "Hiawatha" and the Copland opera will be discussed

**Cleve Twitchell**



*Review*

### Don't miss it

**WHO:** Rogue Valley Chorale, "How the West Was Sung."

**WHEN:** 3 p.m. today.

**WHERE:** Craterian Ginger Rogers Theater in Medford.

**TICKETS:** \$12 general, \$5 for students. Box office opens at noon. Call 779-3000.

in a pre-concert lecture by Keith Campbell, retired Medford School District music specialist, at 2 p.m. today.

After intermission comes a segment of "Hymns of the Old West," beginning with "We Shall Walk Through the Valley" and "Abide With Me," both arranged by longtime Chorale member Carroll Graber.

The women of the Chorale sing Copland's "Zion's Walls," an inspiring work with a gospel sound. And that's followed by "At the River" and "I Shall Not Be Moved."

"Folk Songs and Country Ballads" comprise the final segment, and offer some unusual sounds — from Bill Esser and David McFadden on banjo, guitar and mandolin to Doris Sjolund on the melodica, kind of a miniature accordion.

Mike Knox plays the tuba and Luna Bitzer the flute as the Chorale sings "Bird's Courting Song."

Diane Newland, alto, and John Gilsdorf, tenor, are soloists for "Red River Valley." Later, Gilsdorf plays the harmonica.

Gilsford and McFadden return as soloists in a "Cowboy Medley" arranged by Graber.

And tenor Phil Lind is soloist for "Down the Oregon Trail" first of three "trail" songs.

It's followed by the Norman Luboff arrangements of "Colorado Trail" and "The Old Chisholm Trail," both sung by the men of the Chorale.

The familiar "Home on the Range" concludes the published program, but there was one encore Saturday night, a rousing hoedown piece called "Raise a Ruckus," with tenor Andrew Brock as soloist.

Some songs in the second half may inspire a temptation to sing along, but Sjolund urged anyone with such an idea to "try and squelch it."

The Chorale put in a lot of effort on these songs, he said, "and we want you to hear them."

*Cleve Twitchell is a Mail Tribune editor and columnist. He can be reached at 776-4486.*

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