



KCMETROPOLIS.org

Kansas City's Online Journal of the Arts

<https://kcmetropolis.org>

January 31, 2018

[Sign up for our weekly e-blast](#)

A festival of music

By [Sarah Young](https://kcmetropolis.org/author/sarah_young/) https://kcmetropolis.org/author/sarah_young/ January 29, 2018

The William Baker Festival Singers were joined by Allegro Con Moto of the Allegro Choirs of Kansas City, and the Heritage Choir from MidAmerican Nazarene University during its Festival of Kansas City Composers on Sunday afternoon at St. Mary's Episcopal Church



Many of the songs on this concert have been performed or recorded by the William Baker Festival Singers elsewhere, but the gathering of them on this concert really highlighted the depth and diversity of the area's composers.

Beginning with a choral setting by R. Douglas Helvering of John Ireland's "My Song is Love Unknown," Dr. William Baker and Associate Music Director Jamea Sale set the stage for an afternoon of unique choral sounds. Helvering, who was the Composer-in-Residence for the William Baker Festival Singers from 2002 to 2007, was also a featured composer with his original work, "Ave Maria," that displayed the Singers' fine balanced sound. The final number of the opening group was the always impressive "Tenebrae Factae Sunt" by Geoffrey Wilcken, with soloists Amy Imparato, Erica Seago, Will Brubaker and Ed Frazier Davis.

The current Composer-in-Residence for the Singers is Davis, and several of his works were featured on the program including his unusual setting of “O Magnum Mysterium.” Its fascinating interpolation of a throat-singing sound into the traditional chant is mesmerizingly beautiful. Other Davis compositions included “Set Me as a Seal,” with soloist Sean Sweeden, and a premiere performance of “My Beloved Spoke,” with a quartet of Amy Imparato, Erica Seago, Sean Sweeden and Vincent Gover.

Two other composers connected to the Singers also had highlighted pieces: Vincent Gover’s “Ave Verum Corpus” was a world premiere, and Sean Sweeden contributed his calypso-inspired “Gloria.”

The guest choirs more than held their own in the program with Conductor Christy Elsner leading Allegro Con Moto in a Jake Naverud arrangement of Handel’s “Let the Sea Make Noise” and a beautiful version of “Shine” by Ed Roland and arranged by Elsner. The young ladies of the choir, who are in the seventh grade and up, and from thirty-six area schools, have a stunningly unified sound. Precise diction and musicality are hallmarks of their work. They also presented “But a Flint Holds Fire” composed by Andrea Ramsey and dedicated to calling attention to the water crisis in Flint, Michigan. Featuring the voices of Flint in spoken and sung word, the piece was thoughtful, emotional and beautifully done.

The Heritage Choir conducted by Christopher Smith sang “My Shepherd Will Supply My Need,” a gorgeous setting by Virgil Thompson of the traditional hymn. Heritage Choir has a very clear, almost bell-like quality that was particularly noticeable on “Ose Shalom,” by John Leavitt, which is often sung by very large groups; however, the mid-sized sound of Heritage Choir really emphasized the chordal distinctions while still maintaining warmth and depth, particularly in the lower voices.

All the choirs joined under the conduction of Ed Frazier Davis for a rendition of his arrangement of “How Can I Keep from Singing” as the concert’s final number.

It has already been noted many times that the Kansas City area has a rich, vibrant choral and composing community; that community was on full display Sunday afternoon. The William Baker Festival Singers continue to demonstrate the richness and depth of their interpretive skill as well as their commitment to presenting the very best of choral performance.

REVIEW:

William Baker Festival Singers

Festival of Kansas City Composers

Reviewed Sunday, January 28, 2018

St. Mary’s Episcopal Church