

New Choir Shows Promise in Debut

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In my experience, a choral concert hall is a venue in which one ends up either recoiling, daydreaming or cheering. As with classical dance, choral performance is an art form that requires an extremely dedicated ensemble to achieve even a moderately satisfying result. Luckily for the members of the Yale community, Professor Simon Carrington has brought together such an ensemble. Last Monday night, in the recently renovated Sprague Hall, the newly formed Schola Cantorum gave its first full-length concert featuring works by Lasso, Schutz and Bach.

This year, Professor Carrington joins the faculty of the Institute of Sacred Music, a branch of the Yale Divinity School. A co-founder and 25-year member of the world renowned King's Singers, he brings a fresh, live performance focus to a school largely concerned with scholarly contemplation. His interpretations seem to be sensitive to historical accuracy, while catering to a modern aesthetic. Through each of the pieces the group maintained a smooth, light texture, likely a product of Professor Carrington's English boy choir heritage.

The program began with Orlando di Lasso's "Musica Dei Donum," a 16th century motet. Immediately, I was struck by the blend of the ensemble. Highly enhanced by the scattering of voice parts on stage, the surprisingly dry acoustics of Sprague did not betray any conspicuous departures from a unified sound. Especially in a new choir, this unity is extremely appreciated. Doubtless, as the year progresses, this blend will only grow more sweet and true.

Next to come was the Schutz "Musikalische Exequien," a work composed in 1635 to commemorate the funeral of a German lord. The work calls for a solo tenor, ensemble soloists and choir. William Hite, who joined the Schola Cantorum for this concert, delivered a warm and delicately-approached performance. The work, on occasion strongly rhythmic, might have benefited from a weightier treatment throughout (especially in scattered entrances), but the ringing forte unisons provided rich and moving punctuation. The ensemble soloists played and won the difficult but praise-worthy game of switching to solo sound without breaking the spell of choir texture. Robert Mealy's Collegium Players likewise complimented but never overshadowed the mellifluous Schola harmonies.

For sheer delight, however, the Bach cantata was a winning end to the program. "Wer nur den lieben Gott Laest walten," by no means my favorite composition of the evening, featured stellar performances by choir and players alike that made anything but a Cheshire cat grin a spurious response. The use of gut-stringed violins was a historical touch of great appeal to a contemporary audience craving purity of sound. The soloists were, however, the most enjoyable aspect of the performance. Amy Shimbo, a graduate student in the Department of Music, lent challenging soprano lines an effortless simplicity and tasteful warmth. Shimbo's lightness combined pleasingly with both Kimberly Dunn's resonant alto and Daniel Brimhall's lyrical oboe solos.

The Schola Cantorum will next appear on Dec. 5, when they will perform a concert of credo settings, including a new work by School of Music composer Ezra Laderman. I fully expect that by that date the group will only improve upon its present condition. If it is anything like this concert, you are assured reason enough to cheer.