



Women's Voices Chorus - "Ain't I a Woman!"

by Sarah N. Eichvalds

January 24, 2010, Chapel Hill, NC: [Women's Voices Chorus](#), directed by Allan Friedman and accompanied by Deborah Coclans, sang the praises of women through history, mythology, and beyond during their concert, "Ain't I a Woman," on Sunday afternoon. The University United Methodist Church provided a great acoustical space as well as a lovely setting with balconies, church pews, and Carolina blue walls.

This concert contained a varied repertoire of music, starting with the spiritual, "Ain't I a Woman!," based on Sojourner Truth's speech, and going through praise, love, and just plain songs about women. The repertoire would not be complete, of course, without a piece dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and, just to prove her import, there were *four* such pieces. Though all were in essence the same, each was stylistically different. The first, David MacIntyre's "Ave Maria," is a chant of the title repeatedly, containing beautiful harmonies and great blend by the choir in the fortissimo section. The second, Katherine Dienes' "Ave Maria," sung by the chamber choir, is a haunting piece that reminded me of the resounding sounds heard in a cave. Ramona Luengen's "Salve Regina," containing a flute solo and eight-part splits in the chorus, and Lana Walter's "Elizabeth's Ave," explored the emotions of the Virgin Mary during her pregnancy.

One of my favorite pieces from the concert was "Nancy Hanks." I had first heard this piece sung by a friend of mine at Meredith College. It is a small narration of what Nancy Hanks, Abraham Lincoln's mother, would ask if she came back as a ghost. She asks if we know her son's name and if he was able to get on, the irony being that most everyone today knows his name. Hearing this piece in a choral setting was really quite splendid. It allows the choir to introduce the story of the song and then the soloist comes in as if she were Nancy Hanks herself.

Other highlights of this concert were three premiere pieces by Duke University students or graduates. The first piece, "The Maiden," composed by Paul Leary, contains a narration of translated letters from Joan of Arc. The chorus and percussionists provide the accompaniment that is meant to bring to life the mysticism of her battle against the English. Truly, it sounded every bit like a soundtrack that would accompany Joan of Arc into battle.

The next piece, "Gaia Meets Medea," was composed by Duke student Thom Limbert. The music is supposed to represent the meeting of two deities and the two contrasting ecological philosophies they represent. The only words spoken are

“Gaia” and “Medea.” The choir starts singing one and eventually transitions to the other, the music following the phonetic change.

The last of the three composers was Sidney Boquiren. The piece, “Devi,” named for the Hindu deity, creates a community of singers. On top of the omnipresent phrase “I am,” each member says what they are at their own pace, praising the deity and the feminism in themselves. This individualism creates a community and, in the words of director Friedman, “a mystical swirl of sound.”

The concert ended with another spiritual, “Ain’t No Grave Can Hold My Body Down.” This fun, high energy piece was a great ending number. One of my pet peeves is choirs clapping out of sync, but I’m glad to say that not one person was off, which is a true sign of the effort put into this concert! The crowd evidently agreed and treated the choir to a standing ovation, which resulted in an encore of “Ain’t I a Woman!” I immensely enjoyed this concert and look forward to future performances from the Women’s Voices Chorus.

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