



CHORAL MUSIC REVIEW

## Siblings in Song

### Vox Virorum and Women's Voices Chorus in Joint Concert

By [Harrison Russin](#)

March 23, 2014 - Durham, NC:

If a region's artistic potential and commitment were to be measured by the strength of its community music organizations, the joint concert presented by Vox Virorum and Women's Voices Chorus on Sunday, would make a case for the Triangle's artistic leadership. The two single-gender choruses, of which the directors spoke as brother and sister choruses, offered a program of mostly American music in downtown Durham's First Presbyterian Church, a venue well-suited to the sound of each ensemble.

[Vox Virorum](#), directed by Jeremy Nabors, offered a slew of classic American men's chorus songs. Under Nabors's direction, the chorus successfully navigated some textual tongue twisters, such as the Alice Parker/Robert Shaw arrangement of "Vive L'Amour", and showcased their dynamic control and ability. Some excellent soloists, especially the uncredited tenor in William Henry Smith's arrangement of "Ride the Chariot," highlighted their more virtuosic talents, while the chorus at several points savored the rich, barbershop-like harmonies so often heard in American men's chorus music. The slower "Blow Ye the Trumpet," from [Kirke Mechem](#)'s 2008 opera *John Brown*, was beautifully sung, and the chorus' mastery of breath and dynamics was evident. Despite occasional imbalances – the tenors were sometimes dominated by the more numerous bass and baritone sections – the chorus offered wonderful, enjoyable music.

The [Women's Voices Chorus](#), with nearly twice the number of singers of Vox Virorum, presented a program filled with terrific energy and excellent musical composure. Allan Friedman led the chorus through a series of works premiered or commissioned by the Women's Voices Chorus, again drawing on the theme of American choral repertoire. "Shenandoah," directed with care and deliberateness by Assistant Director Laura Delauney, was particularly beautiful in an arrangement by William G. Lycan; the breadth of the chorus's entire sound was heard, as the individual choral parts joined in each successive verse. A setting of Carl Sandburg's "Shine On, O Moon of Summer" by [Caroline Mallonée](#) created a musical accompaniment bringing the listener to Sandburg's Chicago, filled with descending scales and upward arpeggios. The centerpiece of the Women's Voices Chorus set was a song cycle composed by Friedman, his *Songs of Radiance*. Friedman's cycle follows the course of a day, from midnight to dusk, through a diversity of poems: Elizabethan poets, biblical texts, Persian Muslim prayers, and the text of the yoga Sun Salutation. The music settings were also varied, featuring different arrangements of the chorus (soloist and flute, chamber choir, full chorus). Some of the music was simply metric, like the setting of a Ben Jonson poem in 3/4, while some was more complex, like the "Hymn to Surya" in 5/8 + 3/8, featuring asynchronous entries. The music felt cohesive and the chorus, in its sundry configurations, sang it beautifully.

The final movement of Friedman's cycle, based on an old Russian chant, led well into the first piece of the combined choruses: the popular "Bogoroditse Devo" from Rachmaninoff's Op. 37 *All-Night Vigil*, a series of hymns from the Russian Orthodox vigil service also based on old Russian chants. Along with the other combined number, Moses Hogan's arrangement of "Elijah Rock," the married choruses proved their power and subtleness. "Bogoroditse Devo" is fairly restrained music, although the choir showed their potential volume at certain moments. The ending was gorgeous; if you have the basses to sing Rachmaninoff, why not? "Elijah Rock," a fun pass through an old spiritual, nearly lifted the roof off of First Presbyterian. If these two choruses decide to do a combined concert, they will need to find a bigger hall, or distribute earplugs! The sound, though enormous, was not harsh or violent. Both of these choirs bring energy to their music which stresses the value of community-based music making, truly "amateur" music making in the sense that these musicians are engaged because they love the music. That love came through in every piece, in every smile, and in every breath of this concert.

#### EVENT INFORMATION

Durham -- ( Sun., Mar. 23, 2014 )

[Vox Virorum Men's Chorus](#),  
[Women's Voices Chorus: Joint Concert](#)

Performed by Vox Virorum  
(Jeremy Nabors, director),  
Deborah Coclanis,  
accompaniment

*Suggested \$10 donation -- First  
Presbyterian Church , (919)*

360-5242; [voxvirorum@gmail.com](mailto:voxvirorum@gmail.com) ,  
<http://womensvoiceschorus.org/> --  
4:00 PM



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