

THE MUSKEGON CHAMBER CHOIR

Shirley Albers
Jamie Baker
Sheila Daniels
Ardythe Dezelsky
Julie George
Diane Goodman
Doris Helmus
Lucille Jager
Ann LeJeune
Sondra Lundborg

Carol Wilhelm

C. Richard Borgeson
Kenneth L. Brown
James Crago
Gordon Dahlgren
David Epplett
Kurt Hazard
G. Thomas Johnson
Scott Lachniet
Robert Lehner
Kenneth Michnay

David Wikman - Conductor

Ellen Cutting - Accompanist

Special thanks to the **Dr. Martin Luther Lutheran Church** for providing rehearsal space for the choir.

Vickie Luyendyk
Jackie Martin
Ruth Ann Matthews
Ginevra Naill
Christine Neis
Diane Nye
Janet L. Smith
Leona Spoelman
Suzanne Van Pelt
Diane Van Wesep

Dana Olsen
Roger Patton
David Peden
Eric Rettig
Brian Rhinesmith
David Stegink
Robert Sullivan
Bradley Taylor
Donald Timmer
James Webb

The Muskegon Chamber Choir

David Wikman

Conductor

Presents

"Music
From
The
Reformation"



October 27, 1991

3:00 P.M.

Trinity Lutheran Church
1501 Woodside Road

Music From the Reformation

. . . is a fairly loose title upon which to hang such a wide-ranging program. Josquin died a scant three years after the event in Wittenburg, and Knut Nystedt composed his work 451 years later.

But there are reasons. Martin Luther was a capable musician and held a deep appreciation for the art. He said, "He sings as sweetly as any bird . . .," about Josquin, and refused to ordain anyone who could not sing in tune with a well-modulated voice. Unlike his Genevan counterpart, Luther believed in, and encouraged the arts. This is especially true of music. "Music is the handmaiden of religion." He retained many parts of the Latin mass and promoted congregational singing in the service.

The liberating influence of the Reformation is credited with a veritable explosion of music. While the first portion of today's program stays within one musical epoch of Luther's time, the second takes us forward to the present. We find Brahms setting the Psalmist's plea to a deeply heartfelt motet, exercising his composer's craft to its limits. Or we are confronted by Grieg, returning to the musical traditions of his Norwegian church but clothing them with a musical technique far more sophisticated than we find in his better-known orchestral and dramatic works.

In our final work, we find the continuing Reformation. The composer uses new (shocking) resources for his praise to God. He believes that anything which moves the heart and mind of people to consider their God and their relationship to Him is well within the Reformation tradition.

We have stayed within good Reformation practice by singing the Latin pieces in their original language and translating the others into the vernacular.

David Wikman

PROGRAM I

Haec est dies Jacobus Gallus

This is the day the Lord hath made!
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Alleluia!

Tu pauperum refugium Josquin des Prez

Thou refuge of the poor
Thou art my hope, my redemption,
my Lord.

Be my help when death claims me.

Kyrie from "Missa Secunda" Hans Leo Hassler

Jubilate Deo Hans Leo Hassler

Be joyful in God, all you lands;
sing the glory of his name.

Say to God how awesome are your deeds!

Because of your great strength
your enemies cringe before you.

All the earth bows before you
and sings out your name.

Agnus Dei from "Mass for Eight Voices"
Michael Praetorius

A Safe Stronghold Our God Is Still
Georg Philipp Telemann

INTERMISSION
(fifteen minutes)

PROGRAM II

Motet from Psalm 51 Johannes Brahms, Op. 29, No. 2

1. Create in me, O God, a pure heart
2. O cast me not away from thy countenance
3. Grant unto me the joy of thy salvation

Four Psalms for Mixed Chorus Edvard Grieg, Op. 74

1. How fair is thy face
2. God's Son hath made me free
3. Jesus Christ our Lord is risen
4. In heav'n above

Robert Lehner - baritone
Vickie Luyendyk - mezzo-soprano

Praise to God Knut Nystedt

No losers in musical 'Series'

By JOHN L. ALLEN

Chronicle special writer

I suppose it goes without saying there's a world of difference between the arts and sports. The nature of "competition" in each arena marks that difference most clearly, as was evident Sunday.

When the Braves competed against the Twins in the seventh game of the 1991 World Series Sunday evening, there was only one possible outcome: a winner and a loser; a cheering hometown and a weeping one.

When the Muskegon Chamber Choir went "head to head" against the Camerata Singers earlier in the day, however, there was an alternative possible outcome: two winners, no losers.

The Camerata Singers, of course, had played their innings a week earlier. Sunday afternoon the Muskegon Chamber Choir had the ballpark all to themselves. But for those who had the good fortune (and the good sense) to hear both choral groups, it was

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part of the interest of the second concert to recall the first one.

If the Camerata Singers have plunged into the deep waters of full orchestral accompaniment, the Chamber Choir went in the opposite direction: plunging into the equally deep waters of a program virtually without any accompaniment whatsoever.

Nine of 10 selections were sung a capella — and the sole exception involved a harpsichord. (I couldn't much hear the harpsichord, actually, but I could see Ellen Cutting's fingers move over the keys.)

Holding one's own against an orchestra is a challenge for a choir; but so is holding the listener's attention with no outside help at all. A year ago I said of the Muskegon Chamber Choir that "for me the highlights were the several works for unaccompanied choir that were peppered throughout the program." In one

sense, then, one could say the whole of this year's fall program should have been a "highlight." But that wouldn't quite cover the case. The whole first half of this concert of "Music from the Reformation" certainly held me in rapt attention.

Works for single and double choir, mostly in Latin, from the likes of Josquin des Pres through Michael Praetorius and Georg Philipp Telemann, were beautifully balanced, crisply phrased, sharply enunciated. One could even get a thrill from such small things as the precision with which the choir released the final "n" on a word like "eleison" or the "m" on "pacem." It's the kind of precision conductor David Wikman works for and which his assembled forces can deliver.

But the second half of the program began with a slightly relaxed yet still clean reading of the Brahms "Motet from Psalm 51." And this was followed by a rather muddy rendition of Grieg's "Four Psalms for Mixed

Chorus," with Robert Lehner and Vickie Layendyk as baritone and mezzo-soprano soloists.

The choral work on the Grieg struck me as ragged, at times even a little sloppy. The harmonics employed by Grieg are complex, but ought not to have seemed quite so defeating of the choir as they were. Perhaps it was understandable anxiety over the still more complex work which followed: Knut Nystedt's contemporary "Praise to God."

While the choir carried this one reasonably well, even very well given its challenges, I could see how the prospect of it might have undermined concentration on the Grieg just beforehand.

Everything the Muskegon Chamber Choir sang, at least, was infinitely better than that "Star-Splattered Bangle," as sung by that 7-year-old at the ballgame. Give me Roseanne Barr Arnold any day! Better yet, give me either of our local chamber choirs, with or without accompaniment.

Chamber choir concert solemn, but good

By JOHN L. ALLEN

Chronicle special writer

The Muskegon Chamber Choir sang Saturday evening as part of the 6th Annual Christian Arts Festival at Samuel Lutheran Church, and did themselves proud.

ONE OF the many thoughts which ran through my head as I listened to them was a keen anticipation of the Beethoven Ninth Symphony which they are scheduled to perform with the West Shore Symphony next spring. Both the symphony and the chamber choir are under the baton of directors who get as much perfection out of their performers as they possibly can. Their combined forces should prove a rare treat indeed.

The choir concert Saturday, however, was in honor of the 500th birthday of Martin Luther. It began with music by contemporaries of Luther, and took us through the 200 years which followed. The program consisted of sacred music

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rather than secular, appropriate to the occasion. Nonetheless, it ranged only from the lugubrious to the brightly solemn. Music that was really joyous and celebratory was not part of the evening's fare.

THE CLOSEST the selections came to being jolly was the final pair of songs on the program. One by Pachelbel and one by Telemann, they were both based on the hymn tune most of us associate with Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." Not a depressing hymn, by any means, but solemn at best.

This is not to suggest that the concert itself was depressing in any way. Such vigorous and disciplined singing, even of less than jolly music, is a pleasure to hear. But it seemed possible that the celebration of a birthday, and a 500th anniversary at that, might have been an excuse for some-

thing light and lilted, even if only by way of contrast.

ON THE OTHER hand, a good case can be made for sticking to the solemnity and high seriousness one associates with Luther in particular and the North European temperament in general. It is, after all, his birthday party.

Far more important than a quibble over selections is the plain fact that the Muskegon Chamber Choir is one of the best arts organizations in the area. Its standards are high, and set a standard for any chorus or choir seeking recognition in the county. Champions of this or that singing group would do well to attend one of the Muskegon Chamber Choir concerts in order to see what fine singing area residents are capable of presenting.

THROUGHOUT the program the choir's balance, pitch, dynamics, attacks, and releases were exemplary. David Wikman,

their music director, has obviously chosen his singers carefully and then trained them well. On top of that he gets a first-rate performance out of them, to make it all worthwhile.

Saturday's concert began with three selections by Josquin des Pres (c.1450-1521), and then gave us four hymns by Martin Luther (1483-1546). There was a brief intermission, followed by selections by Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1612) and Heinrich Schutz (1585-1672), and the two works already mentioned from a century or so later.

ALTOGETHER, the program was a good survey of what German Protestant music has been in the time of, and as a result of, Luther. If that adds up to a concert on the solemn side, so be it. Perhaps he did his joking outside the church.

John Allen writes frequently on the arts for the Chronicle, including a regular Sunday column for the Arts-Entertainment section.