

Welsh Choir Inspirational

When performers enjoy what they're doing, the result is usually enjoyable. At Saturday's concert in the Kelowna Community Theatre, the Vancouver Welsh Men's Choir enjoyed themselves thoroughly, and the Community-Concert crowd went away happy.

It was just a bunch (almost 70) of old codgers, amateurs without much formal training, so you might have been justified to expect some pretty dreadful sounds. Instead, you got a polished performance by an amazingly youthful-sounding ensemble

An old concert-hall expression claims that "there is no such thing as a bad choir--just bad conductors." If that's true, then Music Director Jonathon Quick must be a fantastic leader. He certainly is young, energetic, and possesses a lovely lyric tenor voice. His podium style is crisp and clear, as is his diction

When it comes to ethnic choral organisations, their possibilities and their challenges, I know whereof I speak, since I belong to such a group. Whether it be our diminished vocal range, difficulty staying on key, lack of breath support, inability to memorize, failing eyesight and hearing, or unwillingness to learn something new, we older singers are beset by obstacles.

It was, therefore, truly inspirational to note how well the Welsh Men's Choir surmounted all these potential problems and obviously had fun doing it

The program opened with Men of Harlech, and over the roughly two-hour span of the concert, the choir added six more Welsh songs, about half of which were actually sung in Welsh.

Maestro Quick set the bar even higher than necessary by including a capella numbers and by intermixing the various voices, rather than grouping the sections in blocks. It was audacious of him, but the risk paid off.

Franz Schubert's Sanctus was not only sung a capella but also in German. The Welsh Men's Choir's enunciation was excellent.

Besides Welsh songs, the concert encompassed several nautical numbers: We Sail the Ocean Blue and Captain of the Pinafore from Gilbert and Sullivan's H.M.S. Pinafore, Away from the Roll of the Sea, and the well known sea shanty What Shall We Do with a Drunken Sailor, the latter number in a complex but delightful arrangement by Alice Parker and Robert Shaw.

The final group of songs all claimed folk origins. Besides the Drunken Sailor was the Russian folksong Kalinka, the American river shanty Shenandoah, and the black spiritual Down by the Riverside.

Responding to the audience's cheers and applause, the group sang Verdi's Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves from Nabucco as an encore.

Hats off to the men of Vancouver's Welsh Choir. Long may they persist and prosper.

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