

'Hodie' artists wonderfully expressive, lyrical"  
by Edward Reichel  
*Deseret News*, December 21, 2008

With Brady Allred at the helm, the Salt Lake Choral Artists have undertaken a number of major works that one doesn't normally associate with community choirs.

But Saturday, the group, together with members of the Madeleine Choir School and the Salt Lake Symphony, performed one of the more demanding choral masterpieces of the 20th century, Ralph Vaughan Williams' "Hodie."

"Hodie" isn't done frequently, but it's a work that captures the spirit of Christmas as perhaps no other work quite does. Except for the opening chorus, "Hodie" is not an exuberant outpouring that revels in the glory of Christmas, as Handel's "Messiah" does. Instead, it's a contemplative work that is in many ways reflective and inward looking. And that's how Allred approached it.

Allred is one of the finest choral conductors in the country. He delves into the heart of a work and gives powerfully charged readings. He also brings out the very best of his singers. He is a wonderfully musical and perceptive conductor, and that makes his performances memorable. Allred showed a fine command of his forces Saturday, and they gave a richly polished and eloquent performance of a work that deserves to be a staple of the holiday season.

The Salt Lake Choral Artists is a wonderfully musical ensemble. Their singing was consistently seamless and lyrical. The same also held true for the choristers of the Cathedral of the Madeleine. And Allred coaxed beautifully shaped phrases from both groups.

Joining them for "Hodie" were soloists Carol Ann Allred, soprano; Todd Miller, tenor; and Darrell Babidge, baritone. All three were exceptional, imparting warmth and exquisite lyricism to their parts. Particularly notable was Carol Ann Allred's singing of the song "It was the winter wild" and "Lullaby;" Miller's rendition of the hymn "Bright portals of the sky;" and Babidge's performance of "The Oxen."

The Salt Lake Symphony played convincingly with finely nuanced phrases. The orchestra has worked with the Choral Artists under the baton of Brady Allred several times, and each time the collaboration has become stronger. This is a wonderful match of like minded community musicians.

The concert opened with Vaughan Williams' likewise infrequently played "Fantasia on Christmas Carols," which like "Hodie" is a rather introverted but touchingly poignant piece. Allred elicited a wonderfully expressive account of the piece from Babidge and the Choral Artists.