

"A glorious telling of the Christmas story: 'Hodie:' Allred's singers give a memorable performance of a choral masterpiece"

by Catherine Reese Newton

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It's hard to imagine the Christmas Season without G.F. Handel's "Messiah" or Benjamin Britten's "A Ceremony of Carols." Ralph Vaughan Williams' "Hodie" hasn't attained the same familiarity in this community, but it richly deserves to be performed more often. Kudos to Brady Allred and his Salt Lake Choral Artists for presenting this underappreciated masterpiece Saturday.

"Hodie" is a cantata telling the Nativity story through poetry, most of it by British writers, and biblical texts from the gospels of Matthew, Luke and John. A children's choir sings the narrative Bible verses; that role was filled admirably Saturday by choristers from the Madeleine Choir School, who sang with pure tone and first-rate enunciation. Brian Mathias provided adept accompaniment on the Libby Gardner Concert Hall organ.

Tenor Todd Miller, who sang the words of the angel, was gentle in manner, yet vocally secure. Soprano Carol Ann Allred sang expressively in her songs describing the Nativity; the women of the choir joined her in a tender reading of the "Lullaby." Another emotional high point was baritone Darrell Babidge's moving performance of "The Oxen," a beautiful setting of the Thomas Hardy poem. Allred's large choir gave a stirring performance, conveying hushed reverence and boundless rejoicing with equal skill. The Salt Lake Symphony offered sympathetic accompaniment; the woodwind section was especially memorable in "The Oxen."

The concert opened with Vaughan Williams' "Fantasia on Christmas Carols," with Babidge an authoritative soloist in quintessentially British tunes such as the Sussex Carol.

The only downside to Saturday's concert was the fact it wasn't repeated. It's been a few years since the last performance of "Hodie" in Salt Lake City; let's hope we don't have to wait as long for the next one.