

## Musical artists join forces for 'stunning' effect

Voices » Luminescent singing reflects a glowing tone.

By Robert Coleman

Special To The Salt Lake Tribune

Salt Lake Tribune

Posted: 02/22/2009 06:00:00 PM MST

"Te Deum" is a liturgical hymn of praise and thanksgiving. It is an especially significant expression coming from those who have survived years of oppression, including eastern European composers.

Salt Lake Choral Artists' director Brady Allred used "Te Deum" as the theme for his ensemble's concert of music from this region Saturday night at the Libby Gardner Concert Hall.

The program opened with Petr Eben's "Prager Te Deum." A brass ensemble and percussionist accompanied this marriage of traditional and contemporary musical styles.

The choir's luminescent singing of the darkly hued Gregorian plainsong reflected the brass' glowing tone.

Arvo Pärt's "Te Deum" was the program's focal work. The University of Utah Singers joined the Choral Artists, who were divided into men's and women's choruses, to sing three separate parts. They were accompanied by a string orchestra, a prepared piano (screws wedged between strings producing a percussive sound) and a recorded wind harp (long strings creating a droning sound when wind passes through them).

The effect of the combined forces was stunning. The eclectic work merged flowing lines and fragmented accompaniment, pit sound against silence and contrasted unison with harmony.

Ironically, Pärt's minimalistic compositional language created a type of interpretative complexity that Allred negotiated effectively, communicating the work's relevance and spirituality.

After intermission, Janet Todd strolled on stage playing her accordion in authentic Yiddish fashion followed by mezzo soprano Victoria Morris. She sang "Az der rebbe zingt." Their performance was a gem, highlighted further by a young man who danced onto the stage and took Morris for a turn during a

highly ornamented accordion interlude.

The SLCA Women's Choir directed by Jane Fjeldsted sang a set of elegantly crafted but pitch-challenged songs, including a flowing work by Sergei Rachmaninoff titled "The Angel."

Allred's University Singers previewed some of the selections to be performed during their upcoming tour of eastern Europe, capped by their participation at an international choral competition in Germany.

To say they are ready would be understatement. Their performance was impeccable. Selections, sung in Hungarian and Slovenian, had flawless control, crisply articulated lyrics and deeply felt musicality. The conductor's obvious pride in the ensemble was well-founded.

Morris returned to solo with the choir in the final selection, "Tece Voda, Tece" (Waters Ripple and Flow). Eloquently singing of lost freedom returning, the choir created a moving tribute to the indomitable spirit of the Slovak people.

### **Review: Salt Lake Choral Artists perform "Te Deum"**

» **Bottom Line:** Brady Allred takes another step toward choral music nirvana performing works by eastern European composers.

» Brady Allred, conductor

» Saturday, February 21, 2009

» Libby Gardner Concert Hall