

# The Salt Lake Tribune

<http://www.sltrib.com>

## 'Enemy Slayer' draws big crowds

Oratorio » It's a story of healing, grounded in a Navajo world view.

By Catherine Reese Newton

The Salt Lake Tribune

Salt Lake Tribune

Updated:05/02/2009 10:06:11 PM MDT

You've got to hand it to Brady Allred. His Salt Lake Choral Artists continue to present unusual, challenging contemporary works with professionalism and passion -- and draw big crowds to hear them. Last month, it was Tan Dun's "Water Passion." Saturday night, it was Mark Grey and Laura Tohe's "Enemy Slayer: A Navajo Oratorio" that filled Libby Gardner Concert Hall to within an inch of the fire code.

Grey and Tohe described "Enemy Slayer" as a story of healing, grounded in Navajo world view. While the oratorio touches on sacred themes, the creative team was careful not to quote from Navajo ceremony in the music or libretto. It's a classic rebirth story, told through a young Iraq War veteran -- known as Seeker -- who struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder upon returning home to the Navajo Nation. Baritone Gary Sorenson sang the central role, dressed casually in flannel shirt and jeans befitting the libretto's conversational style (albeit punctuated by poetry and occasional phrases in Navajo). The role is demanding -- the baritone sings through most of the 70-minute, six-movement work -- and Sorenson displayed impressive stage presence and secure vocal technique.

The chorus represents Seeker's family and ancestors, reminding him of his place in the community and helping him find peace. The Salt Lake Choral Artists gave a forceful, well-rehearsed performance, making short work of the unusual and close harmonies and enunciating the text cleanly. The orchestra likewise

gave a nicely detailed performance of Grey's colorful score.

Deborah O'Grady's photographs of the Navajo Nation, projected on a large screen next to the orchestra, complemented the music and message. The photos added a sense of the vastness and isolation of the landscape Seeker inhabits; images of plant and animal life were especially well-matched with the music in the work's closing scene as Seeker experiences a figurative rebirth.

[creese@sltrib.com](mailto:creese@sltrib.com)

Enemy Slayer: A Navajo Oratorio

Brady Allred's Salt Lake Choral Artists perform another challenging contemporary work with professionalism and passion.

With » Baritone Gary Sorenson.

When » Saturday.

Where » Libby Gardner Concert Hall.