

Nordic Voices



Nordic Voices takes audience on harmonious journey through time

The a cappella ensemble Nordic Voices capped its American tour on Saturday with an engaging concert at Dumbarton Church.

Charged with fire and energy, the six-member Oslo-based vocal team (two sopranos, a mezzo, tenor, baritone and bass) led its Georgetown audience on an exhilarating journey, jetting through the musical ages from the Renaissance to the present. And they did so with a unanimous sense of purpose, versatility and sheer musicianship that mesmerized listeners.

The singers were finely tuned for a succession of works differing from one another in stylistic details and expressive character. Yet all the settings were met with rock-solid vocal technique — impeccable intonation and diction — and closely defined phrases.

The carefully structured program focused on sacred music, both halves juxtaposing two starkly contrasting, emotion-laden themes.

The first segment centered on soul-stirring dirges (some texts were drawn from the ancient prophet Jeremiah) lamenting humanity's long tradition of leaving its conflicts unresolved. This message pervaded late-Renaissance and proto-baroque motets by Tomas Luis de Victoria, Henry Purcell, Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina and Carlo Gesualdo.

After intermission, the group turned to music voicing hopeful solutions to strife, exploring the theme of consolation with 20th- and 21st-century compositions by fellow Norwegians Trond Kverno, Bjarne Slogedal, Lasse Thoresen, Frank Havroy and Knut Nystedt.

In the Renaissance and proto-baroque music, the singers never veered from pure vowels, glimmering timbres and carefully balanced voices that easily fit the church's resonant acoustics and modest dimensions. Sonic textures were fluidly interlocked as the ensemble glided effortlessly from full-voiced sound to solos and duos surfacing and resurfacing within the ensemble.

Loaded with jarring dissonances, a Purcell setting and a harmonically discordant Gesualdo motet injected strains of violence into otherwise mellifluous textures. All in all, the sextet offered little reason to complain.