

**Concert Report: Oberlin Collegium Reunion Concert
honors Steven Plank (February 20)**

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Why do we have reunions? In almost all cases it is a time to reunite with family, friends and colleagues with whom we share a common bond or experience. Many times reunions can also be a time to honor an event or a person who had an impact on one's life. In the case of the Oberlin Collegium Musicum it was to honor Dr. Steven Plank, the man who has led that ensemble for twenty years. On Saturday the 20th, sixty-one Collegium alumni, presented a concert in Warner Concert hall of music by Tallis, Malvezzi, Palestrina, Gibbons and Lambe directed by their beloved mentor Dr. Plank.

Unlike many reunion concerts, this one-hour performance was all about the music. There were no tributes, remembrances, or even speaking from the podium. To open the concert, the alumni chorus was joined onstage by forty-two members and guests of the current Collegium, and Plank profited by the opportunity of having over 100 singers at his disposal to perform Thomas Tallis's forty-part, eight-choir motet 'Spem in alium', which proved not only a sight to behold but also a true sonic experience as the motet weaved its way though the eight choirs, from left to right and back again, something that would be somewhat less effective had there been only one on a part. The purity of the straight tone singing only increased the level of aural intensity especially in the tutti sections, and totally captivated the extremely large audience.

Once the sound had settled, the alumni chorus gave a sensitive and musically thoughtful performance of 'Noi che cantando' a 8 of Cristofano Malvezzi, This was followed by an outstanding performance of the 'Missa Papae Marcelli' a 8 of Palestrina, during which Plank was able to draw a strong, supported, clear tone from his singers, who performed with clear attacks and diction and precise intonation as well as exploring a full range of dynamics. Listening to this performance, it was difficult to believe that this ensemble had never sung together until the first rehearsal the evening before the concert. For me, this performance showed that over his twenty years as the director, Plank has not only developed one of the most popular participatory ensembles on the Oberlin campus, but he has also succeeded in instilling the basic fundamentals of singing Renaissance Polyphony in his students so strongly that this reunion ensemble was able to perform as well as, if not better than many choirs who come together on a continuous basis.

Next up were two works performed by the vocal quintet "Uncloistered", who came together at Oberlin and went on to study at York University in England. In both 'The Silver Swan', of Orlando Gibbons and the 'Nesciens mater' (Eton Choirbook) of Walter Lambe, the quintet sang with complete control, producing sounds that were so well blended that the softest passages were easily heard and the forte's filled the cavernous Warner Concert Hall with purity of sound. Their intonation is exact and they handled the tricky rhythmic passages of the Lambe with ease. It was a pleasure to hear this young ensemble. They clearly have a bright future ahead of them.

To close the concert, the audience got a reprise of 'Spem in Alium' again with full forces -- but this time it was sung in English and the 100 plus members were spaced both on stage and across the balcony. This use of the special configuration emphasized the motet's linking of the choirs from one end of the balcony to the other, down onto the stage and back up and across again. This was a perfect ending to a wonderful hour of music making. Renaissance polyphony has never been more fun. Congratulations to Steven Plank and to all of the singers. Some where during the evening I heard mention of a sixty- part piece; perhaps something to think about for the future?