

## Cleveland Chamber Choir: Spring at Rocky River Methodist (May 13)

by Daniel Hathaway



Everyone's favorite season of the year has had tough going in Cleveland this time around, with temperatures lurching back and forth between the high 40s and the mid 80s. But Scott MacPherson and Cleveland Chamber Choir certainly nudged nature along at Rocky River Methodist Church on Saturday evening, May 13 with their attractive program, "No Time Like Spring." The concert was to be repeated on Sunday afternoon at First Baptist in Shaker Heights.

The program featured such ebullient fare as Claude Le Jeune's *Revey venir du printans* and Leonard Bernstein's

"Spring Song" from his incidental music to Jean Anouilh's *The Lark*. Flowers were represented by Morten Lauridsen's dreamy "Contre qui, rose" from *Les Chansons des Roses*, Cecilia McDowall's setting of Robert Burns' *A red, red rose*, and Benjamin Britten's *Five Flower Songs* — — brilliant settings of verses by Robert Herrick, George Crabbe and John Clare, along with the slightly naughty anonymous "Ballad of Green Broom."

A subtext of MacPherson's programming was Mother's Day weekend, which inspired the performance of Robert Parsons' *Ave Maria*. And in addition to pieces that implied the connection between mothers and flowers, MacPherson commissioned composer Corey Rubin to write *My Mother*, based on writings by immigrant poets in the Akron area from Myanmar, Syria, and Hungary as part of a project sponsored by the Wick Poetry Center at Kent State University.

The Cleveland Chamber Choir does a masterful and professional job across the board in all repertoire, but they seem to especially enjoy wrapping their voices around challenging modern music. The Rubin and Britten pieces were the highlights of the concert, and the Bernstein, Lauridsen, and McDowall weren't far behind. (Tenor Matt Riser and hand drummer Melissa Ludwa added to the festivities in the Bernstein, and Julie Myers-Pruchenski was the lovely soprano soloist in the McDowall.)

Corey Rubin, who was present to take a bow, fragmentized portions of the three mothers' poems into a continuous meditation on aspects of motherhood, setting them to engaging diatonic music of original shape and texture. Britten must have created a seismic event in the British choral world in 1950 with his brashly forward-looking settings, including what must have counted as extended choral techniques in that era.

J.S. Bach's great motet *Jesu, meine Freude* was the outlier on Saturday. (Perhaps its theme of resurrection and new life was its entree to the evening). But who needs any other reason than the music? Bach's interweaving of the chorale verses with quotations from Paul's Epistle to the Romans creates a masterful structure, and both elements of the work were superbly and vivaciously performed by the choir. The sensitive continuo department included cellist Diana MacPherson, bassist Bryan Thomas, and organist Robert Mollard — who did his best with a synthetic-sounding electronic instrument.

One unprogrammed sign of spring on Saturday: a fleet of motorcycles roared past the church during the Parsons piece. Hopefully that exuberance of another variety didn't ruin the recording that was being made.

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