

Cleveland Chamber Choir & BlueWater Chamber Orchestra (May 19)

by Timothy Robson



The Cleveland Chamber Choir and BlueWater Chamber Orchestra combined forces under Choir conductor Scott MacPherson to play the first of two weekend concerts on Saturday, May 19 at First Baptist Church of Greater Cleveland.

The imaginative and concise program consisted of works by John Corigliano, Ottorino Respighi, and Johann Sebastian Bach. These organizations' second collaborative effort was a successful combination that could fill a gap: providing smaller instrumental forces for the performances of choral

works not requiring a full symphony orchestra.

Respighi's three suites of *Ancient Airs and Dances* are drawn from collections of Renaissance and early Baroque lute dance music, freely transcribed for chamber orchestra with harpsichord. Suite No. 1, performed here, dates from 1917 and maintains the "ancient" harmonies and sounds, but with a charming yet quite 20th-century attitude toward arrangement and orchestration.

Oboist Terry Orcutt and flutist Sean Gabriel were fine soloists in several movements. The overall performance was efficient, but not long on nuance. Notes, rhythms, and dynamics were in place, but details of musical line and phrasing were not fully honed.

In 1961, just after completing his college studies, Corigliano composed his early choral work *Fern Hill*, set to Dylan Thomas' 1945 poem of the same name. Musically it is deeply indebted to Samuel Barber's 1947 vocal concerto *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*. The choice of the long poem, with its florid and referential language, is also that of an

inexperienced composer. The poem is too complex for easy comprehension in a choral setting, no matter how clear the choir's diction. The dense orchestration and reverberant acoustics of First Baptist Church mitigated against understanding the words, even when following the text in the program. But the music itself is gorgeous, and the well-trained Cleveland Chamber Choir sang precisely, with well-blended sound and firm intonation.



Mezzo-soprano Kira McGirr (left) was the excellent soloist. Her clear, focused sound, with vibrato used lightly as coloration, soared over the orchestra. I would like to hear the Cleveland Chamber Choir sing this work again. Being able to wallow in Corigliano's lushly tonal music was worth the performers' effort.

Bach's *Ascension Oratorio*, BWV 11 (*Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen*) is a relatively short, hybrid work more akin to the church cantatas. Kiko Weinroth, soprano, Kimberly Lauritsen, alto, Corey Shotwell, tenor, and Austin Piper, bass-baritone, all sang as part of the chorus, stepping forward for the solo numbers. Shotwell took the part of the Evangelist.

The chorus was again well-prepared. Three outstanding trumpets in the opening and closing movements blazed out brilliantly over the orchestra and chorus, and instrumental soloists provided fine obbligato support to the vocal soloists. Kimberly Lauritsen sang with sensitive phrasing and articulation, completely in control of Bach's awkward vocal leaps. Kiko Weinroth's high, delicate soprano was the perfect foil for an arresting aria that combined flute and oboe obbligato with only upper string accompaniment. The optimistic chorale-based chorus about the Christian's eventual reunion with Christ closed the *Ascension Oratorio* and the concert in rousing fashion.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com May 22, 2018.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)