

Youthful choir debuts with Cappella Festiva

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By James Cotter, Times Herald Record

Poughkeepsie — "Songs of Celebration!" opened the Cappella Festiva's 36th season Saturday evening at Christ Episcopal Church. The 44 members of the Cappella Festiva Chamber Choir, directed by Christine Howlett, were joined by the newly formed Cappella Festiva Treble Choir, an ensemble of 17 singers ages 10-16, whose musical director is Susan Bialek. The featured work on the program, which was repeated Sunday afternoon at Lyall Memorial Federated Church in Millbrook, was John Rutter's "Gloria" for choir, organ, brass and percussion. Voices and instruments combined to make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

The program began with a modern piece, "Arise, My Love" by Z. Randall Stroope, based on the biblical Song of Songs. The emphatic refrain is interlaced with a traditional "Fa la la la" that the pianist Craig Williams accompanied with trills.

The refrain reappeared in the set of English madrigals that the chorus next sang a cappella: the quickly paced "Sing We and Chant It" by Thomas Morley; the lovely, slow "The Silver Swan" by Orlando Gibbons; the plaintive "Adieu, Sweet Amaryllis" by John Wilbye; and the lively "Come Away, Sweet Love" by Thomas Greaves. Intonation, tone and color, especially with the Chamber Ensemble, were exactly pitched and pleasing to listen to in the sopranos and altos.

The youthful Treble Choir, led by Bialek, next sang "Velvet Shoes" by Elinor Wylie and Louise Murchison Evans, a delightful poem that mimics a walk in white snow with its softly floating notes. The youngsters followed up with a tuneful "Deck the Halls" in an arrangement by James McKelvey. The Treble Choir then joined the full chorus to sing John Rutter's melodic "Star Carol," which was conducted by Vince B. Vincent with fine timing and emphasis. Rutter's "Candlelight Carol" benefited from Williams' organ accompaniment in its beautiful evocation of the Nativity scene.

The first half of the program closed on a dynamic note with "Hope for Resolution," which was composed for Nelson Mandela and Willem de Klerk and employs the English hymn "Of the Father's Love Begotten" and the South African anthem "Thula Sizwe," sung in Zulu to the beat of drums. The rhythmic excitement built to a spirited climax.

After intermission, "O Clap Your Hands" by Vaughan Williams sounded the theme of praise that prepared for Rutter's "Gloria." In three parts, it opens with a triumphant brass salvo that explodes with the vocal "Gloria in excelsis." From glory on high the hymn moves to an organ-guided cry for mercy in the middle section, only to return to the brass- and timpani-driven phrases of the finale with its doxology and recapitulation of the initial "Gloria." Sopranos Marta Knapp and Andrea Buergers and alto Kathy Maxcy in turn added their voices to this symphonic hymn of joy.