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5 Reasons Why Choral Music Lacks Street Cred

Chloe Veltman · Wednesday, December 21st, 2011

As the holiday season kicks into full swing and choral music concerts abound, I am invariably reminded of why it is that the genre has so little street cred.

Here are the problems as I perceive them.

1. Composers like to write tediously slow, earnest music. Most of the contemporary repertoire sounds like a dirge, with the same superficially complex harmonies borrowed from the Lauridsen and Whitacre cannons. There's little rhythmicality and joy to any of it. In short, the sincerity bores the pants off me.

2. Choral directors take themselves way too seriously and program too much samey stuff. I guess they can't help it — that's all that's being written at the moment, apparently — as per my above point. The concerts generally lack variety and are often way too long, sending the audience into a comatose state.

3. Singers usually seem completely disengaged. With expressionless faces, they look akin to many performers of contemporary dance. At most, you get one or two simperingly beatific expressions, which are as off-putting as the blank, robotic looks. Where's the fun?

4. The churches in which most choral concerts take place couldn't be less inviting. The pews are hard. The air is cold. The toilets are in the basement. The lighting is bad and there's nowhere to get a drink.

5. Choral people often dress very poorly. I can't stand choruses' attempts at homogeneity e.g. matching uniforms. And the "all black" thing is boring plus leaves too much room for people to get away with ugly variations on a theme like ill-fitting shirts, trousers that are too short and, worst of all, clogs. (I know clogs are comfortable and singers have to stand for a long time. But there are limits.)

I believe that the above issues are easy to fix. Choruses should commission composers to write more fast-paced, joyous and/or rhythmic pieces. Directors should program shorter concerts (max 90 minutes) and include a wide variety of moods and styles into a single program. Singers should understand the words they're singing and wake up. Choruses should stop performing in churches so much. There are plenty of other kinds of venues with decent acoustics. Oh, and the singers and their directors should take a style lesson. Looking good on stage doesn't have to cost much money.

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