



Falmouth Chorale impressive in ambitious program

By Keith Powers / Contributing writer

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FALMOUTH – In the first of two ambitious presentations directed by conductor John Yankee, an augmented Falmouth Chorale sang an impressive program of Pinkham, Mendelssohn and Fauré Sunday afternoon at Falmouth Academy's Simon Center for the Arts.

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The chorale also sings Beethoven's Ninth with Yankee's Falmouth Chamber Players Orchestra in two weeks, making this performance all the more impressive, given the sheer volume of music.

Yankee began with his core group of singers – 15 strong – to sing Pinkham's "Wedding Cantata." They were accompanied in this performance by a talented freelance orchestra.

Pinkham (1923–2006) was a Boston fixture during his long, productive life, teaching musicology at New England Conservatory and directing performances at King's Chapel. His "Wedding Cantata" sets texts from the Song of Songs.

The settings are imaginative and accessible. In just 10 minutes or so, Pinkham runs a gamut of celebratory ideas, exhorting the newlyweds to embrace nature, change and themselves. The small cadre of singers blended appropriately with the instruments.

Mendelssohn's cantata uses texts from the Book of Psalms, largely exploring the anxiety caused from the longing for God. Yankee directed a much larger chorale – about 65 singers – which changed the dynamic of the performance considerably.

The refurbished Simon Center may not look that much different from the earlier version, but the presence of an acoustic shell has deepened the projection power from the stage area. With such a large number of singers, that vocal power was evident.

Still, it was the single voice of the soprano, working with various sections of the chorus, that stood out. Kirchner sings with light, crystal-clear lyricism, at ease in all areas of her range. Her vibrato is true and delicate, and although her range is not super high, she has many pleasing darker colors in her tone.

An aria, “For my soul thirsteth for God,” with a sweet oboe (Melanie Hayn) accompaniment, stood out. As did the centerpiece of the cantata, a quintet that opposes Kirchner with four-part writing for the men’s voices.

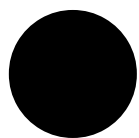
Fauré’s “Requiem” begins with a single D minor chord, setting a firm but respectful mood that hardly ever wavers. The work almost never raises the volume above mezzo-forte, celebrating life after death in austere, measured, but affirming tones.

Baritone Philip Lima joined Kirchner, the chorale and the orchestra for this performance. Lima also sings with inherent lyricism, in a lustrous voice, still with considerable power (there was one particularly impressive fermata, held firmly, at the “Offertory”).

The orchestra has plenty of opportunity to shine in this work. Stephanie Weaver, re-creating the organ part on electronic keyboard, played authoritatively. The low strings introduced the “Offertory” with a beautiful unison phrase, and the high strings, accompanying Kirchner in the “Pie Jesu” section with a delicate, muted opening, also played confidently.

There were moments when the chorale, singing full throttle, overpowered the orchestra. But this work, long a favorite with choruses because of its accessible beauties, was on the whole performed with precision and attention.

The Falmouth Chorale sings Beethoven’s Ninth with the Falmouth Chamber Players Orchestra at the Simon Center on March 24 and 24. The next Falmouth Chorale performance, “Make ’Em Laugh,” will be May 5 and 6 at John Wesley United Methodist Church in Falmouth. For tickets and information visit www.falmouthchorale.org or call 774-392-2383.



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Entertainment & Life

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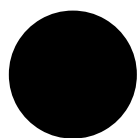
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