

Gerald Dyck raises the baton one last time

Thursday

Posted May 25, 2017 at 2:01 AM

We create our real families. And the longer we have, the greater those families grow.

Gerald Dyck has had forty-three years, and he's got quite a family.

Dyck is leaving his post as music director of the Greater New Bedford Choral Society, but not before leading one final concert Sunday evening at First Unitarian Church in New Bedford. With his chorus, accompanist, four soloists and a chamber orchestra, Dyck said farewell to the ensemble he has directed since 1974, conducting a program that featured his music almost entirely.

A generous crowd came for the occasion, as did mayor Jon Mitchell, who opened the program with congratulatory remarks, along with representatives from the state senate and house.

The music featured the many facets of Dyck's compositions: a love of poetry, and philosophy; a sense of humor, and delight in word-play and its musical analogies; and the overriding dedication to the voice, and its blending with instrumental forces.

Certainly the musical centerpiece of the occasion came before intermission, when the chorus, ensemble and soloists offered Dyck's companion pieces, "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," based on Milton's poetry.

Milton explored the dichotomy between day and night, and between joy and sorrow; Dyck's depiction deepened Milton's observations. Soloists Elizabeth Heath (soprano), Roberta Janelle (mezzo), Thomas Oesterling (tenor), and Gabriel Alfieri (baritone) joined the instrumentalists and chorus.

The part-writing was particularly strong, and the balance between chorale settings, solo lines and duets built a strong musical energy for the text. Dyck frequently had the men and women alternate, as well as paired vocal ranges, creating antiphonal effects. During "L'Allegro," Heath soloed notably

with "And, if I give thee honor due," as did Oesterling with "In notes with many a winding bout." The stately closing verses ("That Orpheus' self") showed the chorus to its best effect.

"Il Penseroso" has an introspective, minor-key feel, its verses turning inward, almost resigned in their investigations. A tenor and mezzo duet, "And may at last my weary age," deeply felt by Oesterling and Janelle, seemed particularly appropriate. The small instrumental ensemble, anchored by bassoonist Saul Woythaler and oboist Laura Pardee Schaefer, played with terrific energy.

Not above making light of the emotional occasion, Dyck programmed much of his humorous and off-beat music in the second half. The chorus, singing alone with versatile accompanist Dwight Thomas after intermission, reprised Dyck's non-sensical "Lobster Quadrille," from Lewis Carroll, and presented his parody of Dvorak's instrumental "Humoresque."

Dyck wrote lyrics to the familiar melody, giving Dvorak a voice in his own farewell: "I wish some clever chap would come along and write some lyrics to my song," Dyck has the composer say.

That chap did come along, and stayed for forty-three years. And because of that, the Greater New Bedford Choral Society has become a family, and enjoyed decades of powerful music-making.

This is the Greater New Bedford Choral Society's final program of the season. The next GNBCS program, under incoming director Jonathan Babbitt, will be on Jan. 7, 2018. For tickets and information visit www.gnbcs.org or call 508-644-2419.

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