



Seraphic Fire draws the curtain on 15th season with music of four centuries

By Inesa Gegprifti



Thu May 11,
2017
at 11:00 am
[1 Comment](#)

James K. Bass conducted Seraphic Fire's final program of the season Wednesday night in Miami.

Seraphic Fire is closing what has been a notably adventurous 15th anniversary season with a similarly wide-ranging program spanning more than 400 years.

The Grammy-nominated choral ensemble graced Saint Sophia's Greek Orthodox Church in Miami Wednesday evening with a performance that confirmed their world-class artistic level. The choir was led by associate conductor James K. Bass, with a guest appearance by the recent University of Miami choral conducting graduate, Kyle Nielsen.

In the recurring melodies of Gregorio Allegri's *Miserere*, the venue's ornate, reverberant acoustic enhanced Seraphic Fire's depth of tone. The singers displayed exquisite sensibility of harmonic blend and induced a sense of meditative calmness, setting the stage for the entire concert.

The *Miserere* and the *Salve Regina a 8* by Tomás Luis de Victoria made use of *cori spezzati*, with

singers placed at different sides of the church. Although not meant for a concert setting, this interpretation was effective, as the enveloping sonority of the double choirs created a penetrating timbre. Tenor Steven Soph and soprano Sarah Moyer traced the extreme high register with rounded tenderness of expression.

Carlos Gesualdo's decadent, slightly twisted harmonies from the 16th century retain their unique quality even to ears used to modern music. In *O vox omnes*, the singers and conductor showcased the recoiling entrances of each voice brilliantly. From the first couple of measures, this work is tinged in intense chromaticism and unexpected turns of cadences.

John Bennet's madrigal, "All Creatures Now are Merry-Minded," was the perfect example of the strength and professionalism of each singer, as well as their impeccable chamber musicianship. The solo voices intertwined and swayed with the articulated dance-like gestures in a sophisticated manner.

Bennet's playful text painting continued to resonate in "The Blue Bird" Irish composer Charles Villiers Stanford's evocative setting of a the title avian seeing its own reflection. Soprano Cait Frizzell took center stage in an ethereal performance. Her breath control, dynamic layering, and angelic tone provided one of the most special moments of the evening. Under Bass's direction, the ensemble was exceptional in providing a silky sonic fabric to surround the Frizzell's delicately projected high notes.

Young conductor Kyle Nielsen led the ensemble in two spirituals, drawing a wide dynamic range with solid phrasing and forward momentum. In "Oh, What a Beautiful City," arranged by Stacey V. Gibbs, the singers responded with great ease to the syncopated rhythms and managed to create beautiful shading with light breezy swells.

The program concluded with *Chichester Mass*, commissioned in 1975 for the 900th anniversary of Chichester Church. American composer William Albright has created an amalgamation of various styles of the choral repertoire. This brief mass touches on the traditionalism of homophonic textures and tonal harmonies, and it travels through to asymmetrical rhythms, frictional harmonies, and glimpses of melismatic virtuosity.

Seraphic Fire's abilities shone in "Christe" where the women glided through intricate canon entrances. The phasing effect on the word "holy" in "Sanctus" displayed outstanding dynamic control, and the quickly paced melisma on "hosanna" in "Benedictus" was tightly executed until the final resounding chord. This evening of sacred music, ended beautifully with the soft introspective words "grant us thy peace" of "Agnus Dei."

The program will be repeated 7:30 p.m. Friday at St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Coral Gables; 7:30 p.m. Saturday at All Saints Episcopal Church in Fort Lauderdale; and 4 p.m. Sunday at All Souls Episcopal Church in Miami Beach. seraphicfire.org

Posted in [Performances](#)