



Jarrett leads Seraphic Fire in German program with spirited Brahms

By Lawrence Budmen



Scott Allen Jarrett conducted Seraphic Fire Wednesday night in Miami.

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Brahms's *Liebeslieder Waltzes* display the lighter side of one of the greatest composers of the romantic era. Tinged with Viennese charm, nostalgia and a sense of wit, these miniature brim with melodic delight.

Seraphic Fire presented the first set (Op. 52) of Brahms' eighteen waltzes on Wednesday night, turning the ornate sanctuary of St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral into an intimate salon.

Guest conductor Scott Allen Jarrett, director of Boston's Back Bay Chorale, told the audience that it was his pleasure "to drive Patrick Quigley's Lamborghini around the block." (Quigley was in the audience on Wednesday.) Jarrett added that he particularly enjoyed this South Florida engagement because Boston has had eighteen inches of snow this week.

Jarrett's sheer joy in making music was contagious and, indeed, he brought his own approach to the choir. Vocal climaxes were big and full, belying the thirteen-singer numbers. Corporate choral textures were infused with a warmth and glow that perfectly meshed with Brahms' engaging vignettes.

Brahms set texts by the poet Georg Friedrich Daumer which are translations of exotic imagery and the choir captured that fantasy-like vision of birds flying through the night and love gained and lost. With the

four-hand piano syncopations gliding vivaciously under the fingers of Jarrett and Anna Fateeva, the choir brought lilt and verve to Brahms' confections.

There was more than a touch of Johann Strauss in the beauty and élan of "Am Donaustrande" (On the banks of the Danube). Clipped vocal phrasing gave real character to the final waltz "En betbet des Gesträuche" (The branches are trembling) as the singers simulated the vision of a bird brushing the bushes. Alto Clara Osowski brought deep tone and feeling to the soloist's tale of a lover's dejection. Jarrett maintained steady tempos and coordination throughout the cycle while bringing dexterity and just the right lift to the keyboard lines.

Jarrett opened the evening with Mendelssohn's "Helig, heilig ist Gott" (High, holy, holy is God), bringing out the flowing warmth of the melody without a trace of sentimentality. Pointing out Brahms' admiration for the music of Heinrich Schütz, Jarrett presented motets by both composers. Brahms' *Warum ist das Licht* is large in scale and structure and the choir's range of vocal colors was appropriately varied. The opening phrases were drawn out and given full dramatic effect; the work's first section ended in a mere whisper, so detailed were Jarrett's dynamic contrasts.

There was a real sense of uplift in the concluding Lutheran hymn. Schütz's "So fahrich hin zu Jesus Christ" was assayed with simple reverence, the mellow sweetness of the women's voices soulful and contemplative. Jarrett's clear and methodical beat kept the textures clear in Mendelssohn's "Herr, nun lässest du demen Diener," a more weighty liturgical score.

A series of night-related pieces set the stage for the Brahms waltzes. Patrick Muehleise's tenor was pure of tone in Schubert's "Nachthelle," backed by four male voices. Sarah Yanovitch's radiant high soprano and Andrew Fuchs' lyric tenor captured the romance of Schumann's "In der Nacht."

The familiar melody of Brahms' "In stiller Nacht" was sung with straightforward warmth and lyricism by the choir. Alto Helen Karloski, one of the group's new faces, displayed a gorgeous timbre and vocal strength in the solo verses of Brahms' "O Schöne Nacht." In Schumann's "Ich bin geliebt," Osowski's rich solo outpouring stood out among the outstanding group effort.

While Brahms' *Intermezzo*, Op. 117, No. 1 provided a contrasting keyboard interlude, Fateeva's bland performance was lacking in sensitivity and passion.

Seraphic Fire repeats the program 7 p.m. Thursday at Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church in Naples; 7:30 p.m. Friday at St. Phillip'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