

It is him!

The Rheinland-Pfalz International Choir spreads feelings of Spring in the Deutschordensaal

By Reiner Henn (translation by Stefan Deßloch)

Musical messengers of Spring were greeting the concert audience in the Deutschordensaal on Saturday, as the Rheinland-Pfalz International Choir presented its concert program. Spring songs from five centuries demonstrated the breadth of the theme: from simple, folkloristic choral arrangements to classical chorales and attractive arrangements of the Beatles era, and finally contemporary choir literature.

Originating from the Ramstein Community Choir formed in 1986, the Rheinland-Pfalz International Choir unites nations and generations as well as professions on a musical path to unity: this choral community in its changing formations as a chamber choir “blackbirds”, as a mens choir, and with its many exceptional soloists completely fulfilled its reputation as a musical ambassador and advocate of sophisticated concert choir literature. All performances – spanning from 16th to 20th century – penetrated deeply into the spirit and nature of the textual message, capturing special melodic features as well as rhythmic finesse, and crafting a homogeneity and expressiveness of sound that originated from the song text and its prosody.

Thoughtfully and with precise signalling, Stephanie Benton – also an excellent pianist and vocalist – directed the choir. Under her leadership, the choir has noticeably developed, appearing vocally matured regarding intonation and clarity of diction. It is surprising that the focus on a programmatic theme still resulted in such a stylistic variety. Not only songs of Spring in a literal sense were selected, but also choral pieces that interpreted spring and its messengers, like birds, in a figurative sense as a symbol for departure. With songs of dance from Hans Leo Hassler’s collection (“Lustgarten neuer deutscher Gesänge”), the choristers jaunted stylistically confident in a swinging triple measure, which felt absolutely stirring. And a very internalized and artfully arranged version of Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” found an adequate presentation by the inspiring soloist Sharon Franklin Baker. Supported well by the insightful piano accompaniment of director Stephanie Benton, whereas the choir accompaniment by Lothar Bendel was sometimes still missing a fraction of full precision.

Without exception all pieces of the program – solistic or choral, or accompanied as well as a-capella – appeared meticulously prepared dynamically, agogically, and regarding the build-up arcs of suspense. For example, in the “Exultate” by Ludovico da Viadana, the “Blackbirds” emphatically captured the rejoicing song of praise in a soaring jubilant tone that outshone everything. A similar jubilant song was then intoned by the full choir, with a harmonically delicate, but confidently accomplished contemporary choral piece by Norman Dello Joio, sweeping away the whole audience in this musically created sense of euphoria.