

## **Pauluskirche: Concert with the International Choir**

*by Walter Falk*

International relations, which are so important these days, have been practiced in an exemplary way by the Rheinland-Pfalz International Choir since almost 30 years. This was demonstrated also demonstrated by 30 singers on Sunday in the completely filled Pauluskirche at Hahnenbalz with the concert "Songs for Christmastide". The program included pieces from the Renaissance, Classical and Romantic eras as well as pieces by contemporary composers.

The concert started with a highlight right away, when guest director Catherine Sailer from Colorado, former teacher of musical director Stephanie Benton, took the baton. With jubilating, angelic soprano voices, the Gloria by John Rutter (born 1945) shone like a rising star. Under the vivacious direction of the American, a lively communication between the choir and the small brass orchestra emerged. Singers and brass players competed in jubilation, repeatedly the trumpets flashed up with rapid staccati and poignant riffs, while trombones and tuba were seething and humming with luscious bass. The architecture of sound between brass ensemble and singers was perfectly balanced.

But also under the direction of Stephanie Benton the singers proved that they are optimally trained. In pieces like "The Shepherd's Farewell" by Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) – superbly accompanied by Susanne Hendlinger (oboe), "Il est né le divin enfant" by John Rutter, "Tollite hostias" by Saint-Saens (1835-1921), or "Singt und klingt" by Michael Praetorius (1571-1651), the choir applied an art that didn't impose on the listener and cleverly steered clear of cliffs. It sang with an internalized stance. Homogeneous tone and pure intonation even in pianissimo were impressive. Only at the beginning there were a few inconsistencies, when the tempo in the piece "Bring a Torch" was slightly shooed, voices came in a little hesitant and homogeneity suffered because of the prominence of individual voices.

The choir diversified the concert by creating small ensembles. With wiry energy and pure voice intonation, the womens choir stormed the internal meshwork of Edward Elgar's "The Snow", accompanied in harmony by Zsuzsanna Przyzycki and Susanne Kremer on violin. The a-capella octet Blackbirds operated flawlessly in songs like "O Tannenbaum" and "The Angel Gabriel" from England. In "Dixit Maria" by Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1612), the immaculate voices of the formation interweaved to form a polyphonic netting and fully revealed the magnificent ornamentation of this song.

With angelic pianissimo, even in the highest registers, soloist Lisa Lindstrom elated the audience in Mozart's "Laudate Dominum", intonating very flexibly and demonstrating an almost endless breath. It was deeply moving when the full choir chimed in on the second verse with a cultivated piano in the background.

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