

Kate Huxel
TheIndyOnline.com
March 1, 2018

“A cappella sung Music brings New Sounds to Fort Lewis College” Photos and Story by Kate Huxel

A cappella, or unaccompanied singing or singing without instruments has a history in Christian churches for over 1000 years. Even though people may have used lyres to carry sung hymns and psalms, most pagan spectacles were associated with choruses, instruments, and dancing. Because the spoken word was not as conducive to hearing as the sung word in churches, a cappella voices resonated and were heard better in these spaces.

The Fort Lewis College Department of Music presented “Love Through Stained Glass” on Friday, February 23, 2018. It presumably referred to a cappella church music and was sung by the Women’s, Men’s, Chamber, Hawkapella, and Concert Choirs. It must be hard enough for a choir to all have perfect pitch, so one opening tone from a piano was accessed to keep on key.

Interestingly enough, the notes sung dissolved into such harmonic dissonance and unfamiliar yet intriguing sounds, resolving into unheard harmonies, that the almost avant garde effect and unusual triads, seconds, and maybe even half tones seemed impossible to emulate. The presentation was stunning and beautiful, not like Bach, Mozart, or even medieval chants, but like modern cathedral music with difficult and unfamiliar tones to both memorize and perform.

The choirs accomplished this perfectly, to my ears. The soloist carried intricate, difficult to sing melodies with the choruses backing them up. The final piece, however, was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore*, and although it seemed more traditional than the other pieces though was probably innovative for the times, it made me appreciate modern dissonance resolving in the other works without the use of even a piano to help the singers stay on key.

Some of the other composers covered included Nancy Telfer, George and Ira Gershwin arranged by Kirby Shaw, and Vijay Singh. Kurt Bestor and Andrea Krause’s *Prayer of the Children* sung by the Men’s Choir, brought tears to my eyes. Also, Hoagie Carmichael, Smokey Robinson and Ronald White, Eric Whitacre, Rene Clausen and Pavel Chesnokov were other composers who shaped the choirs into an angelic sound directed by Dr. Charissa Chiaravalloti.

Hawkapella sang Rogers and Hammerstein arranged by Johnny Mann, and towards the end there was even an African-sounding song accompanied by a beat-box percussion by Imagine Dragons arranged by Nicholas Wright. Even Brian Wilson and Mike Love’s *God Only Knows* had a distinctly different sound, arranged by Tom Bergquist.

The evening held a pleasant surprise of different sounding harmonies and resolutions which made for an enjoyable, unique show, most likely difficult to copy except by the Fort Lewis College Music Department under the direction of Chiaravalloti.

Sources: *A History of Western Music, 9th edition*, by J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, 2014, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2014. page 25.