

## Hippo review NH Master Chorale

New Hampshire Master Chorale, Daniel Perkins, conductor  
Saturday, May 1, 2004 at Brookside Church, Manchester

**review by Lisa Wolff**

An enthusiastic crowd of music lovers heard the New Hampshire Master Chorale in a varied program Saturday evening at Manchester's Brookside Church. Under the direction of Dan Perkins, this twenty-three voice select ensemble is new to the regional choral scene. Perkins, who is Director of Choral Activities at Plymouth State College, has assembled a group of skilled and committed choral musicians who sing with keen intelligence and sophisticated musicality.

Eric Whitacre's evocative setting of e.e. cummings' poem "hope, faith, life, love" set the mood and theme of the concert, with superbly blended close harmonies, the composer's signature style. It's a daring move to open a concert with a difficult contemporary work, but the group segued without a hitch into John Rutter's snappy "O be joyful." They sang with stylish clarity in early motets by Josquin and Schuetz, but they have not quite mastered the inner dance and rhythmic intricacies of this complex music. Indeed, the human voice is the most flexible of instruments, but, as with any athletic pursuit involving muscles, there are limits. Following the early pieces, which call for cool, pure tone, the shift to Anton Bruckner's "Christus factus est" proved too taxing. The group handled the tremendous dynamic range and drama of this Romantic work admirably, but lacking was a solid low bass foundation and the sheer numbers required to sustain this music.

Benjamin Britten's marvelous "Rejoice in the Lamb" featured Robert St. Cyr at the organ, and fine solos by Elaine Kondrat, Gwen Dunn, Terry Merrill, and Michael Corey. St. Cyr, a Manchester native and student at Plymouth State, also contributed a neat performance of the

“Intermezzo” from Widor’s Symphony No. 1. Two premieres of short choral works by John Ratledge and Jonathan Santore emphasized the chorale’s intent to spotlight the music of living composers. Both were well sung, but a printed text would have aided audience enjoyment.

A closing group of spiritual arrangements were highlights, clearly familiar territory for all. A beautiful arrangement of “Shall we gather at the river” by William Hawley was a standout, as was Moses Hogan’s “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel?” Perkins has the energy and fire to make these spirituals really sizzle– he understands the “innards” of this music and goes for the jugular in performance. It is no easy matter to build a small group of singers into a cohesive musical ensemble, but the New Hampshire Master Chorale has made an admirable beginning. This group, and others like it, are much needed on the choral scene to provide continuing education and a creative outlet for the more skilled and talented singers among us. They deserve our applause and our support. Bravo!

-----

Lisa Wolff is Music Director of the Manchester Choral Society. Recipient of a 2002 Artist Fellowship from the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, she is a doctoral student in conducting at Boston University.