

Voces Novae: Women's works are given full voice

By ANDREW ADLER © The Courier-Journal

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Yesterday at 3 p.m. was a pretty good moment in time for women composers. In Louisville, Ars Femina celebrated its 15th anniversary with a concert downtown. And over in New Albany at Indiana University Southeast, Voces Novae devoted its entire program to works from the gender too often slighted by music history.

Artistic Director Frank Heller assembled a typically eclectic lineup of pieces, managing to encompass genres ranging from the 12th century to selections from the 1990s. His chorus, whether in the full complement of about 75 singers or in smaller ensembles, sang with the affection and ability that characterizes most of its efforts.

The only true clunker heard in the Ogle Center's Stem Concert Hall came from perhaps the best-known name of the afternoon: Amy Marcy Beach. Her "Festival Jubilate" resisted every effort by Voces Novae to pull it out of the mire.

Elsewhere the program offered multiple delights. Hildegard von Bingen's "In principio omnes" (from her "Ordo virtutum") was marvelously done -- three solo voices arranged on stage and at either front corner of the audience, with the chorus behind them intoning a soft bass line. It was fascinating a few minutes later to skip ahead more than 800 years to Sally Herman's luscious setting of "O Magnum Mysterium," sung with all appropriate sense of serene contemplation.

Voces Novae member Anne C. Campbell contributed a new piece, "For All Creation," that keenly exploited her colleagues' flexible technique. An even more distinctive vocal flavor emerged from Gwyneth Walker's "Love is a Rain of Diamonds," in which the chorus' women sent a soft, poignant wail through the hall.

Heller never allowed the rapid progression of styles to unnerve him or his singers (demonstrated to pointed effect in Emma Lou Diemer's "Madrigals Three"). He also benefited from Angela Vaughn Hampton, Voces Novae's assistant artistic director and stalwart pianist, who conducted several pieces yesterday.

Indeed, it was Hampton who led the program's most unusual component: Australian composer Sarah Hopkins' "Past Life Melodies." Written for a high school choir in Brisbane, the piece extended a wordless vocalese to a final section conjuring up an Aboriginal soundscape -- another universe, just for an instant.

[Voces Novae Past Concert Information](#)