

A salient night of holiday music

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In what has become one of the region's most magical holiday traditions, St. Martin's Chamber Choir — joined this year by the Baroque Chamber Orchestra of Colorado — kicked off its "Noël Nouvelet" concerts at St. John's Episcopal Cathedral on Friday night.

Playing to a sold-out audience, the ensembles were a perfect pairing of artistic sensibility, as well as musical approach and proficiency.

Centerpiece of the program was a rarely heard Baroque treasure — Marc-Antoine Charpentier's five-part "Messe de Menuit pour Noël" — featuring vocal soloists, along with the 24-voice choir and orchestra.

Timothy Krueger, the choir's artistic director, applied his characteristically nuanced technique to the work's distinct shape and sound. Meticulously molding each movement, he drew forth all the joy and mystery of the Mass set to the words of 17th-century French Noël melodies. Of particular pleasure were several polished solos from alto MB Krueger.

The substantial program opened with Arcangelo Corelli's "Christmas Concerto" in G minor. Led by Frank Nowell, the orchestra's director and harpsichordist, the chamber musicians rendered a range of appealing musical motifs and cadenced melodies. Dependably, concertmaster Cynthia Miller Freivogel shone in her role as first violinist, at once exuberant and sensitive in her playing.

Another highlight was the beautifully layered "Celebrons la Naissance," composed by choir member Micaëla Larsen Brown and featuring luminous playing by violinist Stacey Brady.

Before intermission came a skillfully — and gracefully — delivered motet, "In navitatem Domini canticum," preceded by a set of seven Noël arrangements, some instrumental only. In this set by Charpentier, Krueger ably took on the role of choir member and soloist.

Other terrific performances on the program came from violinist Kathleen Leidig, as well as flutist Tamara Meredith, and from Linda Lunbeck and Michael Lightner on recorders.

The concert — which includes a humorous audience sing-along through "Joseph est bien marie" — repeats tonight at First United Methodist Church in Boulder and at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Denver on Sunday.