

St. Martin's Chamber Choir 9/11 performance conveys hope and resolution

By Kyle MacMillan

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In the face of great tragedy, words alone only go so far.

To come to terms with our pain and find some solace, we instinctively turn to music.

So it was Sunday, as the local classical community marked the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11, 2001, with a series of diverse concerts across the metropolitan area.

Among the most prominent was "Songs of Farewell — A Nation Reflects," performed by the St. Martin's Chamber Choir at Montview Boulevard Presbyterian Church, 1980 Dahlia St., and broadcast live on Colorado Public Radio.

Conductor and artistic director Timothy Krueger assembled what he acknowledged in his introduction was a highly personal program.

He steered clear of obvious masterworks or pieces specifically inspired by Sept. 11 and opted instead for a thoughtful line-up of lesser-known works that addressed the multiple stages of grief. It was solemn, reflective and altogether fitting.

St. Martin's ranks among the region's top choirs, and the 24-voice a cappella ensemble outdid itself here, combining virtually faultless blend and intonation with a deep level of expressiveness.

All these qualities were evident right from its exquisite take on the opening selection, Terry Schlenker's "De Profundis," a sometimes forlorn setting of a portion of Psalm 130. Though written in 2010, it has a timeless sensibility, with penetrating harmonies and melodic purity that sound both new and centuries old.

The fear and uncertainty surrounding Sept. 11 echoed through William Schuman's "Carols of Death" (1958), especially in the second of the three settings of poems by Walt Whitman, with its chaotic opening and angry cacophony.

Eric Whitacre's "Nox Aurumque" struck a particular chord with listeners, both because of its compelling emotional power and the uncanny appropriateness of the text, including these two stanzas: "And an angel dreams of dawns, and of war./She weeps tears of the golden times. Tears of the cost of war."

The evening ended with Hubert Parry's "Songs of Farewell," a section of the program that Krueger appropriately labeled "Solace and Release." And indeed, in these six songs, written just before his death in 1918, there was a needed sense of hope and resolution.

Kyle MacMillan: 303-954-1675 or kmacmillan@denverpost.com