

Classical music review: A golden sunset in 'Simplicity'



A singer with Ember serenades the audience from the aisle.
GWEN OREL/STAFF

By GWEN OREL

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Dressed in shirts of red and violet, Ember, the choral performing ensemble of Schola Cantorum on Hudson, let their voices soar in a concert named "A Second Simplicity: Living with Paradoxes, Doubts, and Mysteries" at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church this past Sunday, May 19.

The concert concluded Ember's 2018-19 season, which celebrated the second half of life.

For information about the ensemble, visit emberensemble.org.

The concert began at 5 p.m., and golden afternoon light filtered through the stained glass windows at the front of the church.

Most of the songs in "A Second Simplicity" were sung a cappella, but a few were accompanied by pianist Matthew Oden.

Deborah Simpkin King, Ember's artistic director and founder, conducted and introduced each piece.

The echoing church was not always friendly to spoken word (this was a problem in Ember's November concert there as well), but after a while the ear adjusts. Fortunately, the lyrics were included in a generous program.

The theme was expressed in the choice of music; the selections were quite diverse and included Stephen Sondheim's "Into the Woods," Dolly Parton's "Light of a Clear Blue Morning," and Sydney Guillaume's "Le Dernier Voyage."

The 12 pieces in "A Second Simplicity" were divided into six sections: an unnamed first section, "Port to Port," "New Melodies," "Old Memories," "As Was, Again It Is," and "Circles and Light."

The glorious voices of the all-ages ensemble resonated exhilaratingly. For the first song, the Sondheim piece, some

of the chorus stood in the aisles to sing.

Cheryl B. Englehardt's "Taurus," performed in the "Old Memories" section, inventively used fingersnaps and whistling. Englehardt is Ember's composer-in-residence.

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"Taurus" was followed by "When Memory Fades," by Jayne Southwick Cool, with text by Mary Louise Bringle, arranged by Eric Nelson. Despite its melancholy lyrics, the song itself had a soothing feel. It is a prayer:

*When mem'ry fades and recognition
falters,*

*Your arms unwearied, shall uphold
us still.*



Ember Ensemble sings at sunset. GWEN OREL/STAFF

The following section, titled "As Was, Again It Is" was the most powerful of the afternoon.

Tenor Chris Howatt beautifully soloed in the melancholy "Remembering That It Happened Once." The standout of the concert was the song that followed, Thomas Juneau's "Sudden Light," with lyrics by the poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In a major key, the melody set to his lines

You have been mine before,

How long ago I may not know;

But just when at that swallow's soar

Your neck turn'd so,

Some veil did fall, I knew it all of

yore.

brought out the theme of emotion that lingers beyond words and memory. King's combination was profound.