



Psalms from the centuries by OSNJ in Montclair



Oratorio Society of New Jersey performs at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in 2016. COURTESY ORATORIO SOCIETY OF NEW JERSEY

*'A Celebration of Psalms'
Oratorio Society of New Jersey
Saturday, Nov. 11, 8 p.m.*

Church of the Immaculate Conception, 30 North Fullerton Ave.

Part of the "Music at Immaculate" concert series

oratoriosocietynj.org

By WILLIAM AMORY

For Montclair Local

"The beauty of this music is built up for centuries," said Sandor Szabo, the conductor of Oratorio Society of New Jersey chorus and orchestra about the program for their upcoming concert titled "A Celebration of Psalms," during a rehearsal last week.

The concert will be performed on Saturday, Nov. 11, at 8 p.m. at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, as part of the "Music at Immaculate" Series.



SANDOR SZABO

The OSNJ chorus will be singing Psalms of the Old Testament set to music by George Frederic Handel, Felix Mendelssohn, and Leonard Bernstein. The program will be a celebration of what Szabo called a "beautiful variety of expression in psalms." The concert will also be a celebration of the genius of the three composers in bringing the unique message transmitted by the Old Testament psalmists. A special treat in the concert will be a short harp concerto by Handel inserted between two of the larger works.

"Psalms are a rich tradition in many human expressions," Szabo said. Handel's "Oh Praise the Lord with One Consent" leads off the program, followed by a short Harp Concerto, also by Handel. Mendelssohn's setting of Psalm 42, "Wie der Hirsch schreit" will follow, with Bernstein's "Chichester Psalms" rounding off the program.

The soloists are Jenny Ribeiro, soprano; Jessica Lauren Copland, mezzo; Errin Duane Brooks, tenor; and Kyle Oliver, baritone.

Copland will also sing what is the boy soprano part in the “Chichester Psalms.” The choral works will be sung in English, German, and Hebrew. Diane Michaels is the harp soloist.

“The whole program is an arc,” Szabo explained. Through the evening, the music spans two and a half centuries: it begins with the setting of the words of the Psalms to music by Handel, a Baroque master with a work written between 1717 and 1719; then the Romantic era’s Mendelssohn follows with a work written in 1837-1838 during his honeymoon. The evening concludes with a work by Bernstein that premiered with the New York Philharmonic in 1965.

The presentation of Bernstein’s “Chichester Psalms” is also in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the composer’s birth.

MUSIC FOR VOICES

Szabo says that one of the delights of the Handel harp concerto for him is the lyricism in the harp’s music, and that while giving the audience an instrumental interlude between big choral pieces, the harp still evokes the vocal and lyrical. Song inspired the Baroque composers in their instrumental works, Szabo said, and in turn, the sounds of instruments inspired the composers to imitate instruments in their vocal writing.

Szabo said that in the Balkans, where he is from, people were often poor and didn’t have instruments, so they developed folk music — in which voices imitated instruments.

In the “Chichester Psalms,” Bernstein features the harp, which was a central “voice” in his conception of the choral piece.



LEONARD BERNSTIEN

Thus there is a link between the purely vocal and the instrumental in Bernstein’s treatment of words and

music.

As the conductor of the OSNJ for 12 years now, Szabo said that for him, it is a most important principle to find a “unique message” for OSNJ’s concerts. For this celebration of psalms, his chorus has to be able to sing in different styles and languages.

In the Handel, singers use a Baroque oratorio style, which will be familiar to many in the audience because of his well-known oratorios such as “Messiah.” Mendelssohn uses a rich, emotional style of singing, and Bernstein occasionally uses the singers as part of the percussion section of his orchestra.

For Szabo, “different repertory has different sounds.”