

MUSIC NOTES

The Moscow Male Jewish Choir

David Amos

On April 11, as part of the San Diego Jewish Music Festival, we had the pleasure of hearing the Moscow Male Jewish Choir in the Garfield Theatre at the Lawrence Family JCC. With a large crowd in attendance, the 20 voices, conducted by Dr. Alexander Tsaliuk and occasionally accompanied by Roman

"finally" they were allowed to perform the music of Ernest Bloch, which I brought to them. In the past, he said, "the authorities simply prohibited any music connected with Judaism."

That said, the Moscow Male Jewish Choir lived up to its reputation of presenting an entertaining concert, with its spectacularly gifted vocal soloists and choral singing. What they lacked in fi-

sound system was a constant irritant; the voices were overly amplified, with up to eight microphones, the system howled occasionally with ear shattering feedback, and at other moments, the speaker's microphone was turned off. These fine voices hardly needed amplification, considering their natural volume and stage presence.

The printed program listed 27 pieces. At first, the order was adhered to, but as the evening progressed, there were omissions, additions, and order changes. But this was quite irrelevant,

for practically everything we heard was entertaining.

Conductor Tsaliuk acted as a lively and humorous master of ceremonies, introducing each song and providing quips and background information. His frequent reminders of the ensemble's compact discs, for sale in the lobby, became an expected part of his routine.

All of the songs that were sung in Hebrew were done in the Ashkenazic pronunciation. As dated as that has become with the advent of modern Israeli pronunciation (And yes, also the Sephardic way), it really did not seem much out of place considering its place

of origin, the Moscow synagogues. It is the way it was enunciated. Actually, this is the style and the tradition that we would expect to hear in a men's Jewish Choir from Russia. Interestingly, the pronunciation of the Hebrew "ch," such as in "Lechayim," or Johan Sebastian Bach, eluded them.

If you were not there, you missed quite a show. Here are a few of titles of the selections we heard (spelled the way they were in the printed program): *She-He-Heyonu, Le Dor Va Doyr, Kadsheyenu, Seu Sheorim, Sheybone Beys Ha Mikdash, Yerushalayim Shel Zahav, Sim Shalom, Ki Lekach Toyv, and Havdoloh*. There were many others.

The *Avinu Malkenu* was composed by the American Max Yanowski, and it brought to me many wonderful memories of hearing it performed by San Diego's own Sheldon Merel, Cantor Emeritus from Congregation Beth Israel.

With no exception, every one of the featured soloists was most impressive.

The *Hine Ma Tov* was also by an American composer, S. Kalib. The *Hassidic Potpourri* was delightfully upbeat. The rendition of *Hashivenu* was especially beautiful. We also heard a Latin-American song, *Jamaica* and the all-time bon-bon crowd pleasers such as *TumBalalaika, Rozhenkes mit Mandlen, and Ba Mir Bitsu Sheyn*. The occasional choreographed hand movements provided visual variety and lightness to the evening.



David Amos has directed the Orchestra at the East County Jewish Community Center for 25 years. This orchestra is now affiliated with Tifereth Israel Synagogue. Amos has also recorded 25 compact discs with orchestras in Israel, U.S., Eastern Europe and London. He is in frequent demand as a guest conductor and lecturer in his specialty, American and Jewish orchestral music. His recordings are played on radio worldwide.



The choir is introduced at the San Diego Jewish Music Festival.

Kurovstev, presented a concert of liturgical Jewish music, folk music, and Yiddish and pop favorites. Clearly plenty of "comfort music" with the programming aimed at pleasing audiences.

Before talking about the music itself, it is worth noting the symbolic extra-musical significance of the evening: This concert would never have been possible in the days of the Soviet Union. It reminded me of the time when I conducted the Lithuanian Philharmonic, barely a year after the country's independence in the early 1990s, when a musician from the orchestra approached me and commented that

ness, polish and subtleties, they more than complemented with sheer power, virtuosity, and showmanship. You could clearly see and hear that this ensemble has been together for some time, as they reacted instinctively to one another.

Even this early in the season, the evening could end up being the biggest event of the year in San Diego Jewish music. Every one of the singers could be an impressive soloist on his own, but as an ensemble, their voices blended well, and packed a wallop of sound, in spite of occasional transgressions in pitch.

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