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## North Shore Choral Society performs with sonic beauty

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When the program is delicious and the soloists are superior, there's nothing for an audience to do but sit back and enjoy. That was the mood on the beautiful Sunday afternoon May 31, as the North Shore Choral Society gave the final concert of its season at the Parish Church of Saint Luke in Evanston.

Guest conductor David H. Edelfelt built the program around the theme of light -- eternal and otherwise. He moulded the 100-voice choir into a supple ensemble, which over the course of the program, showed itself capable of exceptional expressiveness and sonic beauty. The singers were supported by a 34-piece chamber orchestra assembled by concertmaster Thomas Yang, as well as by rehearsal accompanist Sharon Rich Peterson on the organ.

The chorus opened the program with Faure's wordless Pavane, an ethereal piece of music and also sang Morten Lauridsen's "Lux Aeterna." Lauridsen is the top choral composer of our day, and this work, a requiem, is among his most popular. For good reason, as it is packed with beautiful melodies, beginning with gentle prayers for the departed and moving into a brilliant setting of "Veni, Sancte Spiritus" -- especially apt since the concert took place on Pentecost Sunday. It concludes with the meditative "Lux Aeterna, in which the chorus seemed to purr the final notes.

The Faure "Requiem" -- also packed with images of eternal light -- demonstrated special strengths. The women's voices, for example, were able to produce a delicate shimmering sound, enhanced by harp and flute. Lovely soprano Michelle Areyzaga was soloist in the "Pie Jesu" portion and durable baritone Robert Orth sang the "Liberate Me," which referenced the terrors of the day of wrath ("dies irae.") Lest we all become too fearful of our common fate, the composer added the comforting "In Paradisum," in which the tranquil chorus asked the angels to lead the deceased to paradise.

Both "Requiem" soloists are well known by area music fans and it was a pleasure to hear them. Edelfelt also wisely gave them each their own numbers to sing,

Orth, equally at home in operas and oratorios, frequently has leading roles in modern American operas, such as Richard Nixon in "Nixon in China" and Frank Lloyd Wright in "Shining Brow." His number, Faure's "Apres un Reve," gave him the chance to display his strong, even baritone voice, which was touched with a gleaming quality well-suited to the poignant, dreamy poem.

Areyzaga sang Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise" with amazing ease, her incandescent voice wrapping around the luscious melody as if it had been written just for her. This soprano has always had a fine, pleasing voice and a gracious stage manner. But in the last few years, her voice has grown stronger, developing a rich, luminous quality, which leaves her audiences cheering for more.

When the program was over, a bright light from the afternoon sun seemed to flood Saint Luke's Gothic interior. Lux aeterna, indeed.

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