

Masterworks' 'Pandora's Box' gives hope for the arts in Toledo.

by Lysandra Schmidt - Sylvania Advantage | First June 2009 ART NEWS

According to Greek mythology, one good thing came out of Pandora's Box and that was hope. And certainly hope for the Arts in Toledo in particular, was present in its highest form, with the Masterworks Chorale's performance of Collage II at the Maumee Performing Arts Center Saturday May 16.

This was an exciting evening for all music lovers for there was a little of everything for everyone - with Pandora, in the form of Masterworks Chorale and its Artistic Director and Conductor Donna Tozer Wipfli, opening a Pandora's Box from which poured forth a vocalist, a harpist, a flutist, the Toledo Jazz Society, dancers from the Ballet Theatre of Toledo, and music ranging from Bach to Ellington and Gilbert and Sullivan.

This was a concert that arts groups throughout Ohio could do well to emulate - a unique amalgam of some of the best artists that Northwest Ohio has to offer.

In pre-publicity the program was described as "distinctive, stunning and divergent" and this it certainly was... the Chorale providing the continuity throughout the program. The wonderful tone one has come to expect from Masterworks is complemented by the technical depth the choir achieves, and this was never more apparent than in the opening number Gamelon with its complicated rhythms and the spectacular Irish Dulaman, combining traditional Irish melodies about gathering seaweed with the Chorale's own "Three Tenors"; Tom Sheehan, Timothy Langhorst and Scott Bechtol, solos and ensemble, making Irish hearts, in the audience, beat a little faster!

In an evening of highlights it would be remiss not to mention Kim Buehler, one of Toledo's best-know jazz vocalists. Her vocals transported this listener to downtown Copenhagen, the center of jazz in Europe, where she would be completely at home. Her soaring and sometime sultry Round Midnight with Marty Greenberg on bass could be described only as a wonderful duet rather than vocalist and accompanist. She starred again with Martin Greenberg and one of Toledo's jazz legends Tim Whalen (piano) and Scott Kretzer (drums). Many bigger cities cannot boast the depth of talent that Toledo has when it comes to the jazz scene.

Harpist Julie Buzzelli and Kathleen Kretzer showed what accomplished instrumentalists they were, not only in their solos but in their ensemble work with the Chorale.

And what a stunning finale with two of the finest exponents of their particular art in Northwest Ohio, Masterworks Chorale and the Ballet Theatre of Toledo, combining in Gilbert and Sullivan's Cachuca from The Gondoliers. Both Gilbert, a stickler for enunciation and choreography, and Sullivan, whose music in this particular piece captures the effervescence of the dance, would have decided here was "a case unprecedented" to quote from the Gondoliers itself.

Mention must be made of the exquisite dancing of the members of the Ballet Theatre of Toledo and Nigel Burgoine's choreography which brought a third dimension to the music without distracting from the music itself. They were an integral part of the whole in their scenes with Masterworks. What treasures Toledo has in Wipfli and Burgoine.

Thankfully the Collage series seems to have become a continuing tradition with the third edition scheduled for May 15, next year. Long may the tradition continue!

Masterworks choral members from Sylvania include Connie Denham, Betsy Kolasky, Lynn Israel, Jack Leizerman, Joseph Myers, Like Rosen, Tom Sheehan and Dave Stead. Ballet Theatre of Toledo performers from Sylvania were Lauren Burns and Sarah Squillante.