

Lyric Fest's "World of Friends" **Giving children what they deserve**

Tom Purdom

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Troxell, Maggie and Mark Moliterno: Can kids enjoy Mozart?

The latest edition of the annual Lyric Fest children's program can best be described as a show assembled by three experienced mothers who were absolutely determined not to bore the children for one single instant. The 24 numbers on the agenda raced through musical styles from

every section of the world, all accompanied by attention-getting strategies like clowning, acrobatic Ukrainian dancing, rapid costume changes, touches of audience participation and a bit of African drumming.

The three experienced mothers happen to be the talented founders of Lyric Fest — soprano Randi Marrazzo, mezzo Suzanne DuPlantis and pianist Laura Ward. The spectators in the special children's section in the front rows included some pre-schoolers, and I detected just one period when their attention seemed to

wander: Near the end of the first half, a virile, high spirited rendition of Gilbert and Sullivan's "I Am the Pirate King" by baritone Mark Moliterno was followed by two subdued British songs that might have worked better if they'd been separated by something livelier.

Soprano Maggie Moliterno restored the forward motion with a song based on a lively Irish jig tune, and the first half ended with an irresistible, all-out production number. The South African call and response song, "Be Bright in the Corner," featured all seven soloists, the Pennsylvania Girlchoir and African drums played by tenor Richard Troxell as he swayed up and down the center aisle with dancer Lisa Lovelace and a children's dance troupe.

All this and Shostakovich too

Lyric Fest titled the program "A World of Friends" and tied the songs together with a script built around a world tour by actor Jake Miller and Troxell's son, Wilder. In addition to all the standard European countries, the tourists stopped at Cuba, Israel and the emerging economic powers that Wall Street calls the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, China and India). The program included several folk numbers, but the children also got to hear music by composers as noteworthy as Mozart, Brahms and Shostakovich.

When the expedition reached Italy, Miller opined, "There must be a tenor here somewhere," and out stepped a prime example of the breed. Richard Troxell is one of the best, and most successful, graduates the Academy of Vocal Arts has produced— a globetrotting tenor with a great voice and a stage presence that makes him a perfect choice for swashbuckling roles and arias like Rossini's celebration of the dance, *La Danza*. He's also an entertainer who clearly enjoyed standing close to the front rows singing directly to the children.

The songs were sung in their original languages, with translations limited to brief descriptions in the program, but this didn't seem to present any problems for the younger listeners. The foreign language texts also added a touch of realism that's inherent in the international art song tradition. In our monolingual society, American children can benefit from an occasional reminder that they're coming of age in a multilingual world.

The difference in girls' voices

The Pennsylvania Girlchoir proved, once again, that it's a valuable addition to our regional resources. The girls sing in the same range as boys, but their voices are lighter and less penetrating, with a grace that creates an entirely different effect.

One of the most hopeful developments of recent years has been the appearance of musicians who realize we live in a time when they must compete for an audience. We can no longer assume the educational system and general cultural attitudes will steer an adequate audience toward the concert halls. The Lyric Fest triumvirate started planning this program more than six months ago, according to their answer to a question one of the children raised during a brief question-and-answer period just before the grand finale. The result of all that work was a concert that combined showmanship with the quality and sophistication children should be exposed to when they make their first acquaintance with the arts.

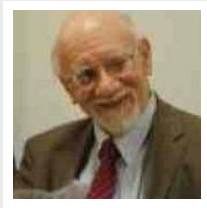


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Lyric Fest offered children an international song and dance extravaganza with the quality and sophistication that kids should be exposed to when they make their first acquaintance with the arts.

Lyric Fest: "A World of Friends." Songs by Mozart, Ravel, Poulenc, Brahms, Barber, Shostakovich, et al. Suzanne DuPlantis, Jennifer Hsiung, mezzos; Cara Latham, Randi J. Marrazzo, Maggie Moliterno, sopranos; Mark Moliterno, baritone; Richard Troxell, tenor. Motet Choir of the Pennsylvania Girlchoir, Mark A. Anderson, conductor; Caroline Foley and the Voloshky Ukrainian Dance Ensemble; Lisa Lovelace and Her Dancing Friends; Jake Miller and Wilder Troxell, actors. November 9, 2008 at Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill, 8855 Germantown Ave. [\(215\) 438-1702](tel:2154381702) or www.lyricfest.org.

ABOUT TOM PURDOM



Tom Purdom (tompurdom@verizon.net) is a science fiction writer and general freelance writer who has been writing about music since 1988.