



LITERACY LOVERS: This Grade 7 class at McKenzie-Smith Bennett school celebrated Literacy Day last Thursday by attending a number of seminars including one on journalism and reporting. The class includes, front: Hollie Manson. First row: Kayln Murray, Mylene Rippon, Jennifer Everson, Rob Rolfe, Ryan Stoddart-Plowman and Steve Blowers. Second row: Matt Grierson, Amy Hilton, Thomas Ferrier, Brenda Bowman and Derek Mandy. Back: Sarah Berry, Beth Clayton, Chagne Du Toit, Caitlin Atherton, Laura Stevenson, Alison Crane, Liz Lewis, Jennifer Haslem, Gilles Luduc, Matt Youngblut and teacher Mike Johnston. — Frances Niblock photo

Choir weaves journey through spiritual cathedrals

Georgetown Choral Society called their Spring presentation. A Choral Celebration, but in essence the 60-plus member choir weaved a musical journey through cathedrals of the mind at Knox Church, Georgetown, last Friday and Saturday evenings.

Contending with the pleasant weather, hockey playoffs on the tube and a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta next door in the John Elliott Theatre, the choral society nevertheless attracted their share of concert-goers to hear a presentation of Antonin Dvorak's Mass in D (Op.86) in the first half of an unusual program. The second half featured the choir and two soloists singing the Chichester Psalms by composer Leonard Bernstein and five Mystical Songs by Ralph Vaughan Williams. These are not pop songs by any stretch of the imagination but for the serious music student they are a challenge.

It is obvious the program took a lot of practice under the experienced baton of choirmaster A. Dale Wood, since Dvorak's Mass in D was sung entirely in the original Latin with a lovely Kyrie Eleison (Lord Have Mercy) to an impressive closing Dei (Lamb of God). Bernstein's Psalms were sung in Hebrew while Williams' Five Mystical songs expressed a spiritual vision which novices might find hard to comprehend.

It is often said that music speaks to all tastes but if Bernstein's version of the Chichester Psalms had not had a translation in the program they could be incomprehensible. Dvorak's Mass in D, unless you are familiar with the sonorous tones of the ancient Latin language of the Church, would have been helped with a similar program translation. Nevertheless, the music was so stirring and evoked such strong spiritual feeling, one could easily have been transported into some

European Gothic cathedral as the liturgy unfolded.

The choir, a marvelous blend of voices with a strong male presence was ably assisted by Christopher Dawes at the organ and the Talisker Players, a group trained in the diversity of styles the program contained. Mr. Dawes is the assistant organist at St. James Anglican Cathedral in Toronto and his accompaniment added much to the program throughout.

It would be difficult to single out any of the six members of the Talisker Players. They ably kept up the tempo when the choir faltered at some difficult point. The percussion section with its use of the tympani, especially during the Benedictus of the mass and in the five Mystical songs, added power to the phrases which might have dragged. Again, one was transported to some mediaeval cathedral where percussion played a large part.

The spotlight fell on boy soprano Alexander Fraser in the second half. Along with the choir, he sang the Chichester Psalms, which originated in the Cathedral of Chichester in Sussex, England, when it joins forces with neighbouring cathedral choirs at Winchester and Salisbury, in a musical festival. Leonard Bernstein, the noted American composer was commissioned to write the Psalms, completed in 1965,

and they expressed an entirely different type of spirituality than Dvorak. Again they conjured up visions of an English cathedral and the tradition of boy soprano blending with strong choirs.

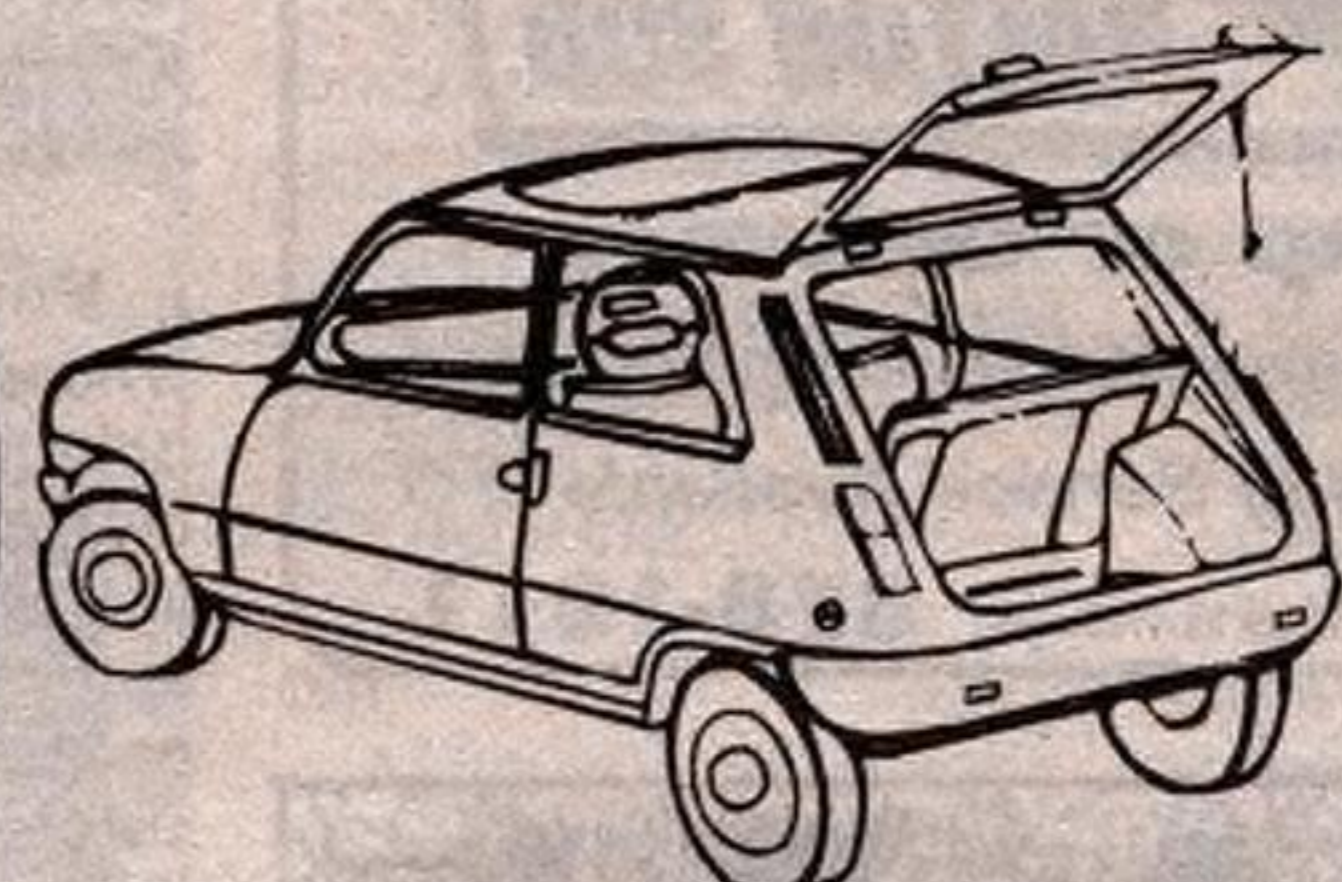
The five Mystical songs, written for solo voice, choir and keyboard accompaniment by Ralph Vaughn Williams, one of Wood's favourite composers, is a serious and reflective work. Baritone Patrick Timney illuminated the songs for Friday's audience which, like this writer, might have found them hard to comprehend. Mr. Timney's strong baritone is familiar to concert-goers in Halton Hills as he appeared in the Choral Society's presentation of Handel's Messiah in December of 1998.

The final of the Five Songs with full chorus and excellent accompaniment concluded a program that might have been more successful to the average concert-goer in Halton Hills if some lighter music had been included. The program was certainly an exercise that challenged the versatility of the choir and its conductor, proving again they could handle serious music of kaleidoscopic dimensions. Whether this scope is reason enough to attract large audiences in Halton Hills is doubtful but for serious concert goers it is an attraction.

— Hartley Coles



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