

Brockville Community Choir Messiah Concert
Sunday, November 27
First Presbyterian Church.

By Howard Alexander

What would Christmas be without a rousing rendition of the Hallelujah Chorus? For the audience at the Community Choir Concert, Christmas has officially begun. The Hallelujah Chorus raised the roof and several fine performances complemented each other in a marvelous evening of community music. As Maestro Paul Wyse stated, the choir and its executive have tremendous commitment and passion for what they do. The choir is to be commended for continually trying to grow musically, this year with the addition of trumpets and timpani, and opportunities for individual choir members to shine.

The spirit of the choir was perhaps best exemplified in the simple duet with Margot Green and Seth Bushnell, the veteran and the rookie performing together in true community. Adele McLeod sang beautifully in the well-known "Gesu Bambino", and the octet of Marianne Enig Carr, Muv Jenkins, two former Directors of Education Charlotte Patterson and Eleanor Newman, Joseph and Seth Bushnell and Alun Jenkins and Artistic Collaborator Malcolm Gillis bounced happily to the catchy rhythms of the Shepherd's Carol.

The biggest round of applause went to Lydia Piehl, former Brockville resident, now in the Master of Music in Opera program at University of Ottawa. Lydia alternately floated and soared through the Christmas standard, O Holy Night. She demonstrated tremendous control, singing one long phrase where most take a breath. The final high note in the final phrase was delivered with effortless poise, bringing the house down with sustained applause. Already an accomplished performer, Lydia could easily be the soprano soloist in Messiah next year.

This year's group of professional soloists for Messiah is probably the best group Brockville has ever seen. The structure of Messiah requires the soloists to do the heavy lifting. The soloists provide the story and the chorus provides the commentary. Without good soloists, the work can be dreary. With good soloists, Messiah becomes very exciting, and that was certainly the case this year. From Frank Wayne Ragsdale's crystalline beginning Recitative and Aria, through Robynne Redmond's rich and robust "Refiner's Fire", to Julie Daoust's sparkling "Rejoice Greatly", the soloists distinguished themselves with interpretations that were both beautiful and exciting.

Passion and commitment carried the Choir through the challenging choruses. Energy and enthusiasm made up for the sometimes shaky fugal work. The Hallelujah Chorus, with the vigorous accompaniment by The Strings of St. John the Evangelist and added trumpets and timpani, was really exciting. It was a thoroughly satisfying performance.

The Community Choir has been through a challenging season with the illness to Director Heather Eyerly and the death of Past President Jim MacNeil. The members responded brilliantly to Interim Director Maestro Paul Wyse who is a concert pianist and a highly respected visual artist. Overcoming adversity to reach great heights. Per Ardua Ad Astra.