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Media Relations

UNH Students Take Home Gold Medals At International Choir Competition

July 13, 2011

DURHAM, N.H. – Stepping out into the cavernous pink marble hall of the Marmorsaal in St. Florian, Austria, members of the University of New Hampshire Chamber Singers knew their performance in the 11th century monastery would be particularly meaningful. The only choir representing the United States at the prestigious 3rd International Anton Bruckner Choir Competition in Linz, Austria, the UNH students would be singing in the very place where Bruckner is buried. As the notes of Clare

Maclean's "Christ the King" began to swirl and resonate, the moment became magical.

"Although we have performed the piece well before, our group has never sounded as unified and beautiful as it did in the Marmorsaal. We worked as a group like we never had before and all allowed for the perfect quality to emerge. The result was the most meaningful performance our group has had yet, which moved some of the audience and the members of our group as well to tears," said Susannah Thornton, '13, who is a member of the UNH Concert Choir and UNH Chamber Singers.

"This piece is close to all of our hearts: it is extremely emotionally charged and our conductor knows the composer personally. Because of this, he knows the message and feeling she was trying to get across in writing the piece and has been extremely attentive to making sure we have the right sensitivity when performing it," said Thornton, of Hanson, Mass.

The 41 members of the UNH Concert Choir and UNH Chamber Singers brought home two gold medals and a silver medal from the June competition – more honors than any of the 20 choirs representing 14 countries. The Concert Choir won two gold medals and the Chamber Singers won a silver medal.

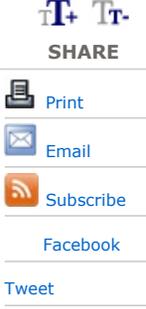
William Kempster, associate professor of music at UNH, conducted both choirs and said both groups did very well competing against some of the finest choirs and chamber choirs in the world. Pianist Paul Merrill also accompanied the groups to Austria.

"The International Anton Bruckner Choir Competition was a tremendous experience for all 41 UNH singers who wonderfully represented the university -- and indeed the United States -- at this prestigious event," Kempster said.

"Perhaps even more exciting was the chance for both groups to perform at the Monastery at St. Florian where Bruckner himself lived and worked for many years. The opportunity to perform not only Bruckner's music, but many of the other sacred works we had programmed for the tour, was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for all of us, and our young singers presented themselves with style and class at all times," he said.

As a vocal performance major, Thornton found each choir's interpretation of the same piece of music particularly intriguing. In addition to their individual pieces, each choir was required to perform "Os justi" by Bruckner in its original key.

"It was amazing to see how differently each group interpreted and thus communicated the piece. Our group had a very specific way we dynamically presented the piece. Upon watching the other groups, it was clear that there were many ways to dissect the score. This reinforced the idea that there is no universal meaning in music: every piece can mean a completely different thing from group to group," she said.


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Linguistics major Ruth George, '13, of Newmarket, came away from the experience feeling she had grown personally and professionally, shaping her into a more worldly person.

"I feel more driven than ever to become more involved with UNH's music department and to try new or different things that I would not normally have considered before. In all aspects, this competition served to make me a better student and a better person," she said.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

PHOTO

The UNH Chamber Singers, conducted by William Kempster, perform Clare Maclean's "Christ the King" at the Marmorsaal, St. Florian, Austria, June 3, 2011. Pictured, from left to right, are Jayne Segedy, '12, of Hillsboro; Sam Bradley, '14, of Hillsboro; Molly McCahan, '12, of Plymouth; Seth Waters, '14, of Dover; and Heather Guilfoyle, '12, of Lindenhurst, NY.

<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/studentsinging.jpg>

The UNH Concert Choir and UNH Chamber Singers, conducted by William Kempster with pianist Paul Merrill.

<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/choir.JPG>

VIDEO

The UNH Chamber Singers, conducted by William Kempster, perform Clare Maclean's "Christ the King" at the Marmorsaal, St. Florian, Austria, June 3, 2011.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9BpSwBRALc>

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