

Concert Review: 'Thus Consider This' choral work shines at composers meeting

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Two premieres, one a calm luminescence, the other a rowdy lampoon, were among the memorable works on Friday's evening concert for the national meeting of the Society of Composers Inc.

The venue was Trinity University's Ruth Taylor Recital Hall.

Matthew Tommasini's choral work "Thus Consider This," performed by the Trinity University Chamber Singers under Scott MacPherson, was the first-place winner of last year's student composers competition sponsored jointly by SCI and ASCAP.

Its worth stems in large part from the composer's discipline in limiting his compositional means. The piece is fairly traditional in its tonality, and the lines generally move together, often in octaves or other uncomplicated intervals.

Most of the interest is in the carefully wrought text-setting, in a distinctive use of pauses and dynamics, and in episodes of very rich chords, like jewels set in the generally plain-spoken landscape.

Discipline is not the first word that comes to mind in connection with Mark Phillips' "Bushwhacked!" for mixed ensemble.

The composer calls the piece "musical therapy" for his "current state of outrage and frustration." Shouted interjections ridicule the present occupant of the White House and put the piece squarely in the polemical camp — needlessly, as the satirical music largely makes the point on its own.

It's a witty blend of allusions to Middle Eastern and American cultures, including something that sounds like the "Mission Impossible" theme, a bit of classic strip-tease leering and a quote from "It Ain't Necessarily So."

The composer's Ohio University New Music Ensemble delivered a high-spirited performance.

Also notable from Friday's concert was the delicious "Seven Little Pieces for Two Pianos" by Misook Kim, who lived in San Antonio for a few years before moving to Chicago over the summer.

Previous works by Kim have been tough-mindedly modernist, but in this set sidelong glances at romanticism and popular idioms weave through the modernist textures.

The second piece suggests a torch song, the third is a burlesque with stride influences, the sixth is a bumptious waltz.

Saturday's final concert, in the UTSA Recital Hall, held two works of special interest.

Tom Peterson composed "A Gentle Whisper," a choral setting of a text from 1 Kings 19, as a response to Hurricane Katrina.

Though thoroughly mainstream in its tonality, the harmonies are radiant and beautiful.

This music is unpretentious and deeply sincere, but not at all simple-minded.

Trinity University composer Timothy Kramer's "Lux Aeterna" was first heard two years ago, but it was a pleasure to hear its lustrous, rich, dense chords and superb craftsmanship again. John Silantien led the UTSA Concert Choir in a solid performance.