

# Washington Chorus and a ‘Parisian Spring’ make for exuberant concert

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By Cecelia H. Porter May 2, 2016

The Washington Chorus, directed by Julian Wachner, ranks among the best in the city. The group’s mostly French concert celebrating the “Parisian Spring” at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall on Sunday proved no exception.

The performance also included stunning versions of Maurice Duruflé’s Mass “Cum Jubilo,” Louis Vierne’s Kyrie from his “Messe Solennelle,” and Gabriel Fauré’s tender “Cantique de Jean Racine.” Wachner’s exuberant wide-ranging motions reinforced the afternoon’s Parisian theme — sidewalks teeming with locals and tourists; street musicians playing at every corner; locals sailing their model boats at the Jardins du Luxembourg.

In Duruflé’s Requiem, a choral staple, the ancient Latin text was so clearly enunciated that it sounded like everyday speech. The chorus’s tone color ranged from wondrously mellow to painfully anguished to delicately compassionate, according well with Duruflé’s perceptive take on the texts. The singers included the superbly prepared Washington National Cathedral Choir of Boys and Girls, which reinforced the utter clarity of the choral textures.

Straight from France, organist Thierry Escaich literally pulled out all the stops of the Concert Hall’s 5,000-pipe Rubenstein organ to improvise a melody concocted by Wachner. It honored Dianne Peterson, the chorus’s retiring executive director. Hands and feet flying, Escaich called on flute, reed and combination stops in an onrush of solos and chordal wizardry from all his keyboards, especially highlighting the pedalboard with its 32-feet bass pipes.

Solos by tenor Lawrence Reppert, baritone Jesse Neace and cellist Danielle Cho, along with Carole Bean’s resonant gold flute, served several choral works beautifully.

There were some missteps: Besides some erroneous program notes, the concert’s first half was too long, for Wachner added his own facile three-movement “At the Lighting of the Lamps.” His extended remarks obtruded, with exaggerated comparisons between French and German music, and between jazz and organ improvisation.

