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## VIENNA BOYS CHOIR

### Critical acclaim

“An incredibly complicated concert repertoire was mere child's play for the talented voices in the Vienna Boys Choir.”

*Southwest Booster*

“The audience was taken on a musical journey which spanned the centuries and covered the globe during a diverse evening of classical, folk, and contemporary music.”

*Southwest Booster*

“Overall I found their choral tone bright and well-tuned and their rhythmic ensemble cleanly executed...”

The singers infused an arrangement of Franz Schubert's “Im Abendrot” (“In Sunset”) with a lush lyricism that made the song a miniature tone poem. And another set of nature-themed pieces, two French chansons by Bruno Coulais, brought a more robust and engaging character from the choir.”

*-San Diego.com*

“Their tone is pristine, their dynamics perfectly rendered, but of course it is their youth and pure soprano voices that make them unique.”

*-Charleston Post and Courier*

“There's no more gratifying sound than that of children singing. And there's no more polished ensemble of children's voices than the Vienna Boys Choir.”

*-Fort Worth Star Telegram*

"Oh! How charmingly sweet they sing! The Vienna Boys Choir conducted by Manolo Cagnin and directed by Gerald Wirth wowed the audience at the Regent Theatre last night with a wide selection of sounds both old and new...Only after two encores - *Now is the Hour* in Maori and English, and *We are the World* - was a stamping and cheering audience happy to rise to their feet to celebrate a wonderful and delightful concert."

*-Otago Daily Times*

“...the Vienna Boys Choir is a world treasure, not just an Austrian one.”

*-Fort Worth Star Telegram*

“...totally disciplined voices tempered by a singular sense of ease and consistency, and a sound conveying ebullience, humor or solemnity as the music called for.”

*-Washington Post*

“bright, light voices through the centuries”

*-The New York Times*

“the angelic voices of this most famous vocal group are ageless”

“a superb musical ensemble...[with] clarion sound”

*-The Salt Lake Tribune*

*-Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

“Time may march on, but the Vienna Boys Choir remains a rock-solid institution. 4 out of 4 stars.”

*-The Green Bay Press Gazette*

“[the] mix of purity and lung power, childlike simplicity and mature command of breath control and phrasing, is what this ensemble is all about...”

*-The Washington Post*



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## VIENNA BOYS CHOIR

The Morning Call • December 9, 2014

# Review: Vienna Boys Choir charming, superb in Allentown

BY STEVE SIEGEL

The venerable Vienna Boys Choir, which traces its roots back to 1498, sent 23 of its finest emissaries to Miller Symphony Hall in Allentown Friday evening for a charming program of beloved Christmas tunes, from medieval chant and folk songs to pop holiday favorites.

The singers, none older than 14, stood in two groups, surrounding choirmaster/piano accompanist Oliver Stech in a sea of spiffy sailor uniforms and rosy cheeks. The group sailed smoothly through a mostly chronological roster of Christmas material, both sacred and secular, in a cross-genre mix of choral and solo pieces from around the world. The journey began with hymns by Couperin and Monteverdi, and ended with modern fare such as Jule Styne's "Let it Snow" and Johnny Marks' "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer."

To ears more accustomed in hearing the ethereal weightlessness of an American or English boys' choir, the sound of the Vienna Boys Choir is a revelation. There is a purity of tone, to be sure, but it all comes at you very directly, in a bright, vibrato-less stream. Overall the balance between the voices and piano was superb, with only an occasional uncertainty in pitch or vagueness in entrance.

The selections from Benjamin Britten's "A Ceremony of Carols" were especially heartfelt, with some lovely solos. A real crowd-pleaser was "Hail Holy Queen" from the popular film "Sister Act," first sung in the traditional manner before shifting into a gospel and rock-and-roll-infused performance, complete with hand-clapping and audience participation.

There was a certain charm in hearing the English lyrics in many of the numbers spiced up with the European elegance of a German accent. Most endearing of all was just watching these kids perform. Despite their purity of tone and natty uniforms, there was just enough fidgeting and eye-shifting going on to remind us that these are regular boys probably anxious for a pickup game of soccer or baseball after the show.



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## **VIENNA BOYS CHOIR**

**The Southwest Booster • November 27, 2014**

### **Vienna Boys Choir shines on Sky Centre stage**

An incredibly complicated concert repertoire was mere child's play for the talented voices in the Vienna Boys Choir.

The 20 voice choir performed twice on the Sky Centre stage this past week, including for the second performance of the 2014-2015 Swift Current Allied Arts Council's Stars for Saskatchewan concert series.

Boasting members ranging from 10 to 14, the Vienna Boys Choir is split into four touring choirs for their performance schedule. The talented group in Swift Current had spent four weeks touring in the United States before continuing through Canada on a 10-date Western Canadian tour.

The audience was taken on a musical journey which spanned the centuries and covered the globe during a diverse evening of classical, folk, and contemporary music.

The rich alto and soprano voices of the young choir easily transitioned multiple languages including Latin, German, French and English, and the choir even performed songs from Taiwan, Pakistan, Namibia and Ukraine.

The evening had a traditional and classical start with a classical repertoire which boasted music by Francois Couperin, Claudio Monteverdi and Joseph Haydn. The choir then showcased their angelic voices on songs including the old English carol Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day, to the Sound of Music by Richard Rodgers, and The Lonely Goatherd by Oscar Hammerstein. An evening highlight was Hail, Holy Queen from the movie Sister Act.

The second half of the show began with European music from Germany, Ukraine, Croatia, Bulgaria and Austria, but they seamlessly transitioned into a selection of world music from Taiwan, Japan, Pakistan, Namibia, Mexico, and USA.

Their final two numbers were the challenging Johann Strauss tunes Annen-Polka and Blue Danube.

## VIENNA BOYS CHOIR

June 13, 2012

### Austria's Stimmbogen celebrates its 10-year anniversary



Stimmbogen is an arts education initiative which was started in 2002 by the Vienna Boys Choir and the Austrian Ministry of Education, Art, and Culture. The aim of program is to encourage children and adults to explore the power of singing and to increase its appeal.

Every year Stimmbogen visits educational institutions around the country to educate the public on different topics related to singing. They produce concerts and host discussions and workshops with voice experts, ENT specialists, speech therapists, voice coaches, choirmasters, and music teachers.

On June 26, 2012, Stimmbogen turns ten and to celebrate a song sung by Austrian schoolchildren together with the Vienna Boys' Choir will be broadcast via live stream into classrooms around the world. The creators of the project, entitled "Mutter Erde" ("Mother Earth"), hope children across the globe will tune in and sing along.

1600 children will sing different locations throughout Vienna such as the Vienna State Opera, the Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum of Natural History, Parliament and City Hall. The day culminates with a live performance in Vienna's Konzerthaus. School groups and choirs will perform alongside well-known professionals such as the Vienna Boys Choir and pianist Markus Schirmer and friends.

The event will stream at 11:00AM Central Europe time on June 26 at <http://konzerthaus.at/stimmbogen>

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## VIENNA BOYS CHOIR

[mywesttexas.com](http://mywesttexas.com) • February 15, 2012

### In the limelight - Vienna Boys Choir

BY GRAHAM DIXON

Standing at least a foot shorter than anyone else in the choir, he looked almost too vulnerable to be standing on stage before an audience of several hundred people. Yet watching him closer, you could see he was in fact holding back when singing along with the other 23 boys. As he stepped forward for the solo in "Omnes de Saba venient," Phillip Schiretz, who must be only 7 years old, filled the church with a most beautiful, soulful soprano voice.

Thus the Vienna Boys Choir introduced a packed house to a heavenly musical talent last Saturday night at First Presbyterian Church .

But their first number was the gritty, passionate "O Fortuna" from Carl Orff's Carmina Burana. Here the power of their voices was rather jolting -- an anthem to the power of Luck that has smiled so much on each member of this choir.

They are led by the delightfully animated Italian conductor and pianist Manolo Cagnin. He conducts his choir with his whole body. His face might be seen as a multifaceted baton that changes expression -- it is so elastic it almost changes shape -- according to the mood he is instilling. But behind his infectious vivacity lies the stern discipline so characteristic of Austrian culture -- as Dr. Tom Hyde said to me at dinner afterward, it was quite remarkable to see the self-control and maturity of these boys as they stood with such poise throughout their two-hour concert.

Ne'er a fidgeting leg or a hand out of place for the whole evening.

While it is an ensemble of the first degree, the Vienna Boys Choir also highlights its soloists. In the first half we were stunned by Schiretz, but in the second it was Edis Levent's voice that dominated, with its ethereal, haunted quality. A boy soprano is one of the purest sounds in existence, and with Levent it is at its most pristine.

While the audience experienced what it had probably expected -- perfect boys voices -- the sheer joy and vibrant fun that exuded from the stage was the most exhilarating aspect of this show. Michael Owu, originally from the Republic of Congo, was quietly expressive in Elton John's classic "Can You Feel the Love Tonight?," while in "Widerspruch" the choir's voices took on a quadrophonic quality.

The highlight of the evening came in "Miniwanka" or "Moments of Water." The voices embodied the multiple characters and moods of water. From a dripping tap to a rushing river to waves crashing and on to indecipherable but undeniably watery sounds, the choir illustrated what modern music can be at its best. The lack of formal structure allows for a flowing imagination and sheer inventiveness. "Moments of Water" was hypnotic. Best of all, the smiles being exchanged between the boys showed their delight, even while they sang with a consummate accuracy.

Near the end a series of Strauss pieces evoked the more humorous side of Germanic culture. If there are German Beer Festivals in heaven, this is how their drinking songs will sound. The boys captured the rowdy, vaguely out-of-control atmosphere of those gatherings while also creating visions of waltzing, elegant couples.

A beautiful and yet earthy end to a wonderful evening's entertainment.



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## VIENNA BOYS CHOIR

New York Daily News • December 6, 2009

# Edis Levent sings a historic tune first New Yorker in Vienna Boys' Choir

BY ELIZABETH LAZAROWITZ

A Brooklyn choirboy has performed all over the globe, but it's a gig closer to home that's making him really nervous.

Edis Levent, 11, the first New Yorker in the Vienna Boys' Choir, is set to make his hometown debut today at Carnegie Hall.

"I'm actually really excited and a little nervous because my friends and my family are going to come," said Edis, who was raised in Bay Ridge.

"I'm thinking, 'What are they going to say later?'"

Edis, who moved with parents Nina and Adam Levent to Brooklyn from Germany as a baby, began studying the violin and piano at age 4.

When his sister Isabelle, 8, began voice lessons, Edis took an interest.

At his first recital, he was so shy the audience couldn't even hear him, mom Nina said.

Yet, on a whim, she asked for an audition with the boys' choir in the spring of 2008.

"I thought he would just get a little encouragement, since he hadn't sung much outside of home," she said.

After a couple of tryouts and a month at the choir's summer camp in Austria, Edis learned he'd snagged one of 100 spots in the 500-year-old chorus.

Then just 9, he was reluctant to leave family and friends for boarding school in Europe, but decided "it was going to be a good thing, because you get to travel around the world and sing."

The boys tour about three months out of the school year, often spending hours on buses when they're not in Vienna.

When the group takes the stage at Carnegie Hall, dozens of Edis' Brooklyn friends and family will be there to hear his sweet soprano in the French Christmas carol "A Maiden Most Gentle."

"He has a solo, so I'll be nervous for him," Nina said. "I hope his sister doesn't throw herself over the balcony because she's overexcited."

While the performance should be a thrill, Edis is just as excited about the day after. That's when he gets to spend time

## **Vienna Boys Choir**

New York Daily News • December 6, 2009

page 2 of 2

with loved ones, decorating the Christmas tree before heading back on the road until Dec. 21.

"I really can't wait to see my family," he said.





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## VIENNA BOYS CHOIR

Rockford Register Star • November 18, 2009

### Vienna Boys Choir provides resounding Rockford performance

BY SUE LANGENBERG

The Rockford Coronado Concert Association presented a second concert in its series Tuesday evening: a resounding performance of the Vienna Boys Choir.

The house was nearly sold-out, including about 80 members of Rockford's Kantorei boys choir.

Also, an Austrian TV crew was on hand to film a documentary featuring the touring Vienna group with some extra welcome from the Kantorei backstage.

The Vienna Boys Choir has been a phenomenon of excellence and cultural presence for about 500 years. Historians agree on 1498 as the inception, but until 1918, the secret gem performed exclusively for the imperial court, Mass and private functions. That would include famous composers — Haydn, Mozart, Bruckner and Schubert — who participated in this wonderful choir.

Now, the group has garnered world attention by sending touring groups everywhere to inspire and share their musical heritage.

Choirmaster Manolo Cagnin accompanied the 22 boys, making his first North American tour.

His musical accomplishments of choral music and conducting hail from Venice as well as Leipzig, Germany. As a performer, he is energetic and charismatic, with a playful rapport between choir and audience. He was able to balance a

## **Vienna Boys Choir**

Rockford Register Star • November 18, 2009

page 2 of 2

rehearsed discipline from posture to polished shoes, yet bring out the gleam in every musician's eye that says, "Let's have fun playing music."

The program began on a high note with the works of composer Carl Orff, including "O Fortuna" from "Carmina Burana," a marvelous 20th century creation. Orff composed this haunting and rich Medieval-style piece that needs to be performed more often, everywhere, as a brilliant statement of life cycles. The choir with soprano range was magical, as the composition demands.

There were heavenly 17th-century motets including "Cantata Domino," a more contemporary "Ave Maria" and Francis Poulenc's "Ave verum corpus" ("Hail, true body"), all in angelic harmony. Giuseppe Verdi's "Dante Alighieri" ("Hello Spring") was a rolling and sweeping melody.

Some pieces were performed with director Cagnin at the piano, some a cappella. The boys were attuned and tuned-in.

The second act loosened to perform livelier music from around the world. There were soloists within the pieces, including "Santa Lucia" from Naples, Russian folk song "Kalinka" featuring wonderful acrobatics, Korean love song "Arirang" and lyrics from musicals including "Fiddler on the Roof" and "Hair."

Most moving and inspiring from these children in the encore selections was "We are the World."



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## VIENNA BOYS CHOIR

Washington Post • December 22, 2008

# Yule Cheer, Doubled: Boys Choirs of Germany, Vienna

BY CECELIA PORTER

It's not often that you can hear two superlative boys choirs back to back.

On Thursday, Germany's Toelzer Boys Choir sang at the historic United Church in Foggy Bottom, which serves a German-speaking parish. Austria's Vienna Boys Choir appeared on Friday at George Mason University's Center for the Arts. Fresh from lengthy international tours, both brought sold-out audiences to their feet and offered multiple encores. Both groups have an astonishing vocal range stretching from coloratura to mezzo and tenor territory (the Viennese including some bass notes). The groups sang in distinctly different performing spaces, one in an intimate chamber situation, the other in a full-size concert hall. Virtually every boy in the two choirs also had a chance to exhibit a resonant, skillfully rendered solo as well as choral singing.

One of four touring ensembles, the 19 Toelzer youngsters, 10 to 12 years old, filled United's sanctuary with traditional Alpine Christmas folk songs, most of them in the peculiar German dialects of that region. The ensemble was chosen from a the 250-voice choir at its Bavarian home base. Rarely heard here, the music followed the order of the Christmas story from Advent and the Annunciation (a favorite subject of celebrated painters), to Mary and Joseph seeking shelter in a crowded Bethlehem, the angel visiting the shepherds, and the manger scene -- largely lullabies for the newborn Jesus.

Accompanied by an attentive unnamed harpist, the singers missed none of the sprightly dance character in many of their carols. Conducted by the Toelzer's founder, Gerhard Schmidt-Gaden, onetime chorus master at Milan's La Scala Opera, the choir -- attired in lederhosen and loden jackets -- responded to his every gesture with a voluminous and blended sonority. Consonants were ultra-precise and vowels wide open, everything delivered with buoyant energy and long-breathed phrases perfectly in tune.

Twice as large as Thursday's choir, the Vienna boys, 10 to 14 years old, trooped confidently onto the stage sporting cheery sailor outfits. Remarkably, their superb performance capped a nine-week tour with 44 performances. But the Vienna was peppy from start to finish. Founded over half a millennium ago in imperial Vienna, this ensemble (100 strong at home) programmed an impressive mix of art songs, opera choruses, American classic pop (Harold Arlen and Irving Berlin), a sacred hymn (sung in Lebanese) and familiar Christmas fare. Their texts covered no fewer than six languages.

Conductor Kerem Sezen drew from his choir totally disciplined voices tempered by a singular sense of ease and consistency, and a sound conveying ebullience, humor or solemnity as the music called for. Close attention was paid to contrasting tempos and dynamics; intonation was right on the mark except toward the final songs. A soloist in the Lebanese hymn captured the singular grace of its ornate melodic lines in a manner that was breathtaking.



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## **Vienna Boys Choir**

**Charleston Post and Courier • December 5, 2008**

### **Vienna Boys' choir stirs holiday spirit**

BY CAROL FURTWANGLER

Christmas angels have nothing on the Vienna Boys' Choir who sang true — ringingly true — to their musicianship and to a plethora of composers Thursday night at Gaillard Auditorium.

A sold-out crowd, including more than 550 students, barely took a breath as the 23 boys, none older than 14, exhibited a stunning level of discipline in every aspect of their inspiring performance, which was part of the Charleston Concert Association season.

The selections ranged from a traditional carol from the 15th century (when the Vienna Hofmusikkapelle was formed, to include six boys by order of Emperor Maximilian I) to Bizet and Schubert, Puccini and Paul Simon (yes, of Simon & Garfunkel fame).

Kerem Sezen, this choir's conductor and accompanist, agreed to reverse the two halves of the program to accommodate the large number of kids who presumably would prefer to hear holiday favorites such as "White Christmas" and "Jingle Bells." Great numbers of these Charleston County School District kids stayed for the entire presentation.

In sailor suits crisp as their diction, in front a snowy mountain backdrop and charming stage sets, the boys never lost focus, keeping their eyes on Sezen, singing everything from memory, and demonstrating an ideal of choral singing. Their tone is pristine, their dynamics perfectly rendered, but of course it is their youth and pure soprano voices that make them unique.

If a single soul in the audience went home without feelings of gratitude for the joys of the holiday season, then go back to Whoville, you nasty old Grinch.



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## Vienna Boys Choir

Fort Worth Star-Telegram • November 17, 2008

### Vienna Boys Choir displays vocal skills in wide-ranging program

BY CHRIS SHULL

There's no more gratifying sound than that of children singing. And there's no more polished ensemble of children's voices than the Vienna Boys Choir.

The 24 boys sang Monday at Bass Performance Hall in a program featuring prayers, pop music and polkas. In sweet treble voices, they sang songs from across continents and centuries.

The choir is famous for its Christmas albums and TV specials. But the group also holds a central place in Vienna's cultural life. There, the choir boys celebrate Mass, sing with the Vienna Philharmonic and perform onstage with the Vienna State Opera.

The touring choir's program Monday focused on that triangle of duties. Either unaccompanied or with piano, the boys sang Latin motets and contemporary church music and classical songs by Schumann and Schubert (Schubert himself sang in the choir in the early 1800s). They also performed two famous opera choruses from Bizet's *Carmen* and Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. The gospel hymn *Amazing Grace* and the jazzy *New York, New York* paid homage to America.

The kids were perhaps most at home singing three Strauss polkas but also gamely sang pop classics *Stormy Weather* and *Bridge Over Troubled Waters*. John Lennon's *Imagine* rang with sentiment; 30 years ago, young people sang the verses with the same hope and innocent longing.

Bass Hall's dry acoustics didn't always serve the choir ideally; more reverberation would have let the boys' pure, pearly voices better mingle and linger. But the singers, ages 10 to 14 and wearing their traditional uniform of black slacks and white sailor's shirt with dark blue collar, performed with the guileless zeal of youth.

The choir was impeccably prepared and led by conductor Kerem Sezen. (The boys sang some 30 songs over two hours without music.)

A Lebanese hymn rang with exotic Eastern harmonies; an African call-and-response concluded the evening, proving that the Vienna Boys Choir is a world treasure, not just an Austrian one.

## Vienna Boys Choir

Kalamazoo Gazette • November 27, 2006

### Newest Vienna Boys Choir engages audience members

BY C.J. GIANAKARIS

Saturday evening's concert at Miller Auditorium put on display the latest incarnation of the Vienna Boys Choir. In a performance called "Christmas in Vienna," two dozen choristers between the ages of 10 and 14, dressed in sailor suits, came on stage, singing. That part was familiar. But new elements soon appeared.

Leading the group was recently appointed choirmaster Andy Icochea Icochea, and with him came a different approach to presenting the boys. Peruvian-born Icochea Icochea began by establishing ongoing "conversations" with the audience, briefly announcing the overall program and introducing each selection.

For those awaiting church music to showcase the boys' unique crystalline sound, the first set of songs more than satisfied. Early Gregorian chant was followed by Renaissance polyphonic. Next came Mozart's beloved "Ave verum corpus" and an excerpt ("Lobe den Herren, meine seele") from Mendelssohn's second symphony. The secure, dependable boy sopranos proved especially fine here.

Other spiritual music included a lovely Peruvian hymn composed in approximately the year 1500, "Hanac Pachap," arranged by the conductor. Equally fresh in direction were an Uzbek folk song, "Shoch va gado," and the Far East Indian "Namo, namo Maria." Both pieces approached being production numbers by using three drums, piano (played by the conductor) and, in the Uzbek song, a cello.

Closing the section was an original choral rendering of Psalm 61, composed by Icochea Icochea. Combining faint rock and syncopated gospel, this piece required interaction from the audience in the form of rhythmic clapping.

Marvelous Austrian folk songs closed the first half, enhanced by Icochea Icochea's interesting narratives preceding each number. Mostly singing a cappella, the boys responded well to the conductor's fluid gestures. "Wann du durchgehst durchs Tal" revealed splendid vocal shifting by the singers between pianissimos and double fortes. "Und wanns amal schen aper wird" showcased singers in folk outfits, dancing in a circle.

"Waldhansl" mandated audience clapping rhythmically on cue, following a short training session by the maestro -- a process unimaginable at a Vienna Boys Choir concert 20 years ago. Two infectious dances by Johann Strauss Jr. led into an intermission. Strauss earned strong applause for his polka and the waltz "Wein, Weib und Gesang" which received engaged performances by the boys.

The concert ended with a dozen Christmas songs from around the world. Mostly sung a cappella, these pieces ranged from gorgeous (the Peruvian "Huanyo Navideno with pipes) to mundane (a stodgy "First Nowell"). The blend and intonation of the Vienna Boys Choir throughout the show were admirable, if not extraordinary. And the boy sopranos were impressive, often lending stability to hold a work together.



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## **Vienna Choir Boys** **The Hawk Eye • November 24, 2005**

### **Vienna Choir Boys deliver holiday treat**

BY DALE ALISON

Burlington Civic Music started the Christmas season on an appropriately high note with a Thanksgiving eve concert by the famous Vienna Choir Boys.

It was amazing how 25 young boys' voices can fill the cavernous Memorial Auditorium so beautifully, especially when a disproportionate number of them obviously were fighting some sort of croup.

The first half of the concert included pieces selected by conductor Martin Schebesta that he acknowledged leaned heavily on Vienna-based composers, Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven (perhaps German by birth, but inspired by Vienna, Schebesta noted.)

Included were pieces by Mendelssohn and Haydn, who sung in the choir as 19th-century lads. As a treat, the choir added an enchanting "Blue Danube Walz" to its program.

After intermission, the selections took on a holiday theme, highlighted by a version of "Noel," that Schebesta thought he found tucked away in an Austrian monastery, but learned later it was included in the 1947 MGM classic, "The Bishop's Wife," where Cary Grant directed the Vienna Boys Choir.

Schebesta apologized for the boys' English pronunciation, but only in "Deck the Halls," did the "fa-la-la-las" hint of an Arnold Schwarzeneggeresque accent.

My favorite was "The Little Drummer Boy," but it probably would have been regardless of who sang it. The choir, though, did what the audience expected and sang it superbly — over muffled hacks and wheezes from some of its members.

After its closing the program with a surprisingly stilted "Jingle Bell Rock," the choir sang two encore pieces, "Silver Bells," and the song conspicuously absent from the Austrian-based program, "Silent Night." With it, the pre-teens sang notes so high they bounced off the fluorescent bulb at the rear of the auditorium that's been flickering seemingly forever.

None in the audience left disappointed, but many hoped there was plenty of chicken noodle soup on the tour bus. The choir will perform Friday in Chicago.





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## VIENNA CHOIR BOYS

New York Times • December 20, 2005

### Messengers of Cheer, Clad in Sailor Suits

BY ANTHONY TOMMASINI

The Vienna Choir Boys ensemble is generally considered to have been founded in 1498, when Emperor Maximilian I, having set up court in Vienna, included a roster of boy choristers among his palace musicians. For centuries the choir thrived. Among its illustrious graduates are Schubert and the conductors Hans Richter and Clemens Krauss.

In recent decades the institution has acquired some entrepreneurial savvy. A private organization, the choir has picked up the Hotel Residenz Palais Coburg in Vienna as a sponsor. So it was not surprising that the Christmas concert these 25 endearing young singers presented at Carnegie Hall on Sunday afternoon, for all its musical strengths, was calculated for commercial appeal.

The program of a cappella works and pieces accompanied by piano ranged from a Renaissance motet by Hans Leo Hassler and a psalm setting by Henry Purcell to holiday standards like "I'll Be Home for Christmas" and "Jingle Bell Rock." All selections, whether Schubert's serenely lyrical Psalm 23 or Jule Styne's snappy "Let It Snow!" were sung with the same intent focus, motionless posture and purity of sound.

The Vienna Choir Boys is an impressive operation that runs its own school for 250 youngsters, who receive a thorough musical and general education. From this student body, which includes girls, the most talented boys are chosen for the prestigious touring choir. Its members range in age from 10 until, well, whatever age an individual boy may reach while still retaining his pre-pubescent voice.

The choristers on this occasion were unquestionably skilled musicians. Their sound was ethereal and true. They sang all works confidently from memory, focusing on their conductor, Martin Schebesta, who also played the piano. The boy standing closest to Mr. Schebesta's right also assisted by leaning over to turn the pages of the piano score without dropping a beat of his vocal part.

Historical authenticity is not a priority of the Christmas concert tour. An anonymous 16th-century Latin song was performed in a full-fledged modern arrangement accompanied by piano, with an added drum and tambourine, played by two singers, lending a rustic touch. And four excerpts from Britten's "Ceremony of Carols" were accompanied not by harp, as in the original, but by the piano, which sacrifices much of the music's tender character.

The choir concluded the first half of the program with an encore, and you could have predicted the choice: a vocal arrangement of Strauss's "Blue Danube Waltz," which elicited nods of recognition from pleased families all over the hall.



## Vienna Choir Boys Mankato Free Press • November 17, 2005

### Big voices

BY AMANDA DYSLIN

MANKATO— Their small frames, baby faces and goofy smiles made it obvious the bodies on stage Wednesday night were adolescent boys.

But their demeanor suggested otherwise.

There was no elbowing neighbors or making bunny ears for those standing in front like you might see during a junior high choir performance. These choir boys performing in Trinity Chapel at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato were professional. They stood straight. Arms to their sides. Quiet (aside from muffled coughs into the palms of three boys suffering colds).

And when it was time to sing, that's when they most defied the stereotype of their age. Uniting 23 angelic voices, the Vienna Boys' Choir sang with power and authority on their opening song, Henry Purcell's "O Praise the Lord," accompanied by conductor Martin Schebesta on piano. Their voices filled the chapel with choral music ranging from the 16th to the 20th century, with about 350 audience members looking on.

"I never thought I'd get to hear them," said Julie Quist, a senior music major at Bethany. "It's a once in a lifetime thing."

The Vienna Boys' Choir, or Wiener Sängerknaben, have a reputation of being eminent musicians. For those who hadn't heard their voices before Wednesday night, when they performed before a full house, the boys lived up to it.

"Their reputation precedes them," said Kristin Lussky, a junior music major.

Lussky, a soprano in Bethany's mixed choir and women's choir, said she couldn't pass up the opportunity to see such a renowned choir perform. As someone who knows a great deal about vocal performance, Lussky said she could appreciate the boys' performance on a whole other level.

"Not just, 'Oh that sounds pretty,'" she said.

Lois Jaeger, fine arts director, said tickets sold out for the performance quickly and she had a long waiting list for possible cancellations, which didn't surprise her. The Vienna Boys' Choir has been around for 507 years, and she knew many Mankato-area people would love to be included in "that long and prestigious history."

## **Vienna Choir Boys**

Mankato Free Press • November 17, 2005

page 2 of 2

The choir's origin can be traced back to 1498, when Emperor Maximilian I moved from Innsbruck to Vienna and ordered six boys to be among his court musicians.

There are about 100 choristers between the ages of 10 and 14 who board at the school. The group is divided into four touring choirs, which give about 300 performances each year in front of about 500,000 people. Each group spends between nine and 11 weeks of the school year on tour internationally.

With members of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and the Vienna State Opera Chorus, the Vienna Boys' Choir continues the tradition of the imperial musicians: as Hofmusikkapelle they provide the music for the Sunday Mass in Vienna's Imperial Chapel, as they have done since 1498.

## VIENNA CHOIR BOYS

Green Bay Press Gazette • November 23, 2004

### Vienna choir's tradition endures ★★★★★ (out of 4)

BY WARREN GERDS

A knowledgeable, interested audience of about 1,000 turned out for the Vienna Choir Boys concert Monday night at the Weidner Center.

Attending was a man whose family is steeped in barbershop singing, singers from fine local choirs, budding music teachers, a veteran who remembers hearing the choir at a midnight Mass while he was a soldier stationed in war-torn Vienna in 1945 and others who simply enjoy hearing richly layered songs sung by highly trained boys ages 10 to 14.

With a history tracing to 1495, the choir is famous for being famous—and good.

Monday, 25 singers with a slight assist from floor microphones made the Weidner sound like a cathedral. songs had a ringing quality.

The boys were dressed smartly in uniforms of black pants and shoes and white sailor-like tops with black trim. Conductor Karem Sezen was dressed in formal black tie and tails.

Centuries of discipline oozed from the stage.

The choir mostly was static. It's all about the song and the sound.

Sezen colored the proceedings a bit in introductions. After "Ave Maria," sung in Gregorian chant, he noted this is "ancient music" that is "From the beginning of (western) music."

After Alpine yodeling in an Austrian folk song, he invited the audience to sing. "This is probably the first and only time to sing along with the Vienna Choir Boys," Sezen said.

Songs sung in Austrian composed by such countrymen as Mozart and Strauss had an extra color to them. (However, not all the boys are Austrian. One is from Columbus, Ohio.)

The program ranged from the striding "O Fortuna" from the rousing "Carmina Burana" to American composer Aaron Copland's playful "I Bought Me A Cat" to a rhythmic African chant with the boys lined up across the stage in the encore.

Always, the songs were in multiple layers and combinations. This was difficult music.

At times the boys were stretched when they rose to heights where female sopranos comfortably soar. On the other hand, that sound is the distinctive boy choir sound.

The second half was all Christmas music. This included songs sung in Latin, such as "Glory In Excelsis Deo" and (beautiful in a cappella) "Adeste Fideles."

The piano arrangement for "White Christmas" was a bit corny, but so many other songs flowed warmly

The titles of many would be meaningless here, but the melodies were familiar from carols and hymns down through time.

Time may march on, but the Vienna Choir Boys remains a rock-solid institution.

## **VIENNA CHOIR BOYS**

**Green Bay Press Gazette · November 23, 2004**

page 2 of 2

A requisite group of Christmas carols had some surprising musical touches. "O Little Town of Bethlehem," for example, was presented in a lovely and harmonically rich a cappella setting. If the programming was a little treacly, only a hard-hearted sort could have resisted these sweet-voiced choristers singing "The Little Drummer Boy" with such beguiling innocence. And it was cute to hear German accents in "Jingle Bell Rock." Rock dat night away.