

Hesperion XX shares music, Spanish history

By Pollyanna Rhee
Contributing Reviewer

The music of Renaissance Spain filled Brendle Recital Hall Oct. 25 with the performance of the acclaimed instrumental ensemble Hesperion XX and the vocal talents of La Capella Reial de Catalunya in the second concert of the Secrest Artist Series.

The group's use of period instruments and fine musicianship presented these older works of classical music in an authentic and delightful manner.

Hesperion XX, whose name comes from the Greek word for "west" and the ancient name for Italian and Iberian peninsulas, was formed in 1974 by Jordi Savall to explore Western European music written before the 19th century, with a concentration on Spain.

The evening's performance centered on pieces written during the time of Philip II of Spain, from 1527 to 1598. The performance was divided into four sections of short pieces, both sacred and secular.

The first set of pieces, dances and romances, were sprightly court songs that were both elegant and fun. The opening song, "Romance a la muerte de Don Manrique de Lara" by Juan de Leyva, opened with the clean, high tones of the voice of contratenor Carlos Mona. The violas de gamba, winds, voices and percussion seemed to float over the delicate sounds of the lute and guitar played by Rolf Lislevand.

Years of playing together have allowed Hesperion XX to adapt and enhance the performance of each individual. The instrumental "Moresca" by Pedro Guerrero



Courtesy of News Services

Hesperion XX explored Western European music Oct. 25 in the Secrest Series Concert in Brendle Recital Hall. Playing both secular and sacred pieces, the ensemble focused on pieces written during the 16th century.

gave ample proof of the importance of this group's accomplishments in classical music.

The last song in the first section, "Lavanta Pascual," celebrating the liberation of Granada through the eyes and ears of two shepherds, brought the already skilled musicianship to a new level. The 400-year-old song was given an interpretation that made it seem quite modern.

The royal court commissioned the sec-

ond segment of pieces, "La Música De Palacio," for various members or events. The mix of instrumental dances and songs spanned from the slower "Il Re di Spagna: Basse dance" by Diego Ortiz to the brisk and animated "Dindirindin" by Mateo Flecha.

Influenced by popular tunes of the period, the court songs featured the exaggerated and emotional lyrics of poets writing for the amusement of Philip II. The beauti-

ful harmonizing of the musicians and vocalists during pieces such as "Madre la mi madre" was clear and confident. The incredible technical mastery and expression of the musicians shone.

After a short intermission, the group performed more somber "músicas espirituales," sacred pieces of Francisco Correa de Arnaux, Tomás Luis de Victoria and Bartomeu Carceres.

The group's beautiful interpretations of

these sacred, Renaissance pieces came together in moments of sheer and haunting beauty. The mysterious "Canto Ilano de la Inmaculada Concepcion" by Francisco Correa de Arnaux and "O magnum mysterium" by Tomás Luis de Victoria were both definite highlights of the sacred songs.

Instruments of the Renaissance period are usually quieter with less range in sound than modern instruments but the sensitivity and expression of the performance was noteworthy. The final piece of this cycle, "Tau garcá la durundona" ended these sacred pieces on a lighter note.

The final section of songs, "Diferencias y Tonos Humanos," comprised a variety of popular and court songs.

These songs, described as "extravagantly bawdy and joyfully erotic" describe daily life of the people of Renaissance Spain from young aristocrats parading through dark and seedy streets to peasants dancing in the countryside.

They were executed with much exuberance and succeeded wonderfully in painting portraits of every day life in Spain. During "Danza del Hacha," an anonymous, instrumental piece, further talents of the group were revealed through improvisation. The improvisation additionally added to the theme of active life during the time period.

The theme and subsequent variations started with the viola de gamba and eventually added other viols, percussion and harpsichord. The final piece, Juan Arañés's "Chaconna: A la vida bona" was bright and lively, bringing the audience to its feet in gratitude.

After the program was finished, the audience was treated to two short encores, and both were greatly appreciated.

Hesperion XX and La Capella Reial de Catalunya are two extremely talented groups of musicians who have brought new recognition to the music of the Renaissance.

New film fails to rise above pleasant

By Radford Hallman
Old Gold and Black Reviewer

Pleasantville is another film to add to the ever-growing pile of almost-but-not-quite films of 1998. Gary Ross (screenwriter of *Big* and *Dave*) makes his directorial debut in this fairy-tale story of '90s meets '50s. Though extremely charming and hilarious in parts, *Pleasantville* falls victim to didacticism and presents a problematically simplistic message.

The film begins in a present-day, unnamed suburbia that looks suspiciously like southern California. The high schoolers chew plenty of gum, and "like" is spattered throughout their dialogue. David (Tobey Maguire) and Jennifer (Reese Witherspoon) are brother and sister. David is obsessed with the Nick at Nite-esque reruns of *Pleasantville* and Jennifer is, of course, obsessed with sex.

When their argument over whether to watch MTV or the *Pleasantville* marathon gets a little too heated, Don Knotts, playing a magical TV repairman, shows up just in time, of course, and the siblings are transported to the black-and-white world of Pleasantville.

David and Jennifer find Pleasantville to be '50s suburbia where no one seems to have an original thought and the biggest concern for the fireman is whose cat may be stuck in a tree. David, at first, feels at home because he knows every detail about the television show, but Jennifer is not about to assimilate herself into the society.

Little by little, David and Jennifer inject some by introducing the town to sex and art (with a few other things thrown in). The visual change is interesting to watch on screen because of the digital effects used to bring black and white back to glossy Technicolor. Because the film was originally shot in color and then changed to black and white with computers, the black-and-white tonality is very flat and looks like a computer screen, but the contrast with color is all the more striking with the gradual change.

This film offers subtly good performances from Joan Allen as the ultimate housewife and Jeff Daniels as the diner-owner-turned-master painter. Allen's realization of her sensuality is perfectly realized by the actress. Daniels delivers a quiet, but extremely endearing, performance as a man stuck in the routine of life until he realizes his talent and his need for art.

The motif of temptation and the fall of mankind as a good thing in the film is an interesting suggestion for a big-budget film, but it is played in a highly humorous fashion that slightly downplays the theme but still fits in with the overall feel of the film.

The production design of the film also stands out. Pleasantville is created superbly as a '50s town where the houses all look the same and main street only runs in a circle.

By the end of the film, Ross uses the story as a medium for preachy anti-racist speeches. Although this theme is evident as people move

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from black and white to being colored, its understatement would have been far more powerful than making this a major plot point. The introduction of cognizance and sensuality into this society was far more interesting as the film progressed.

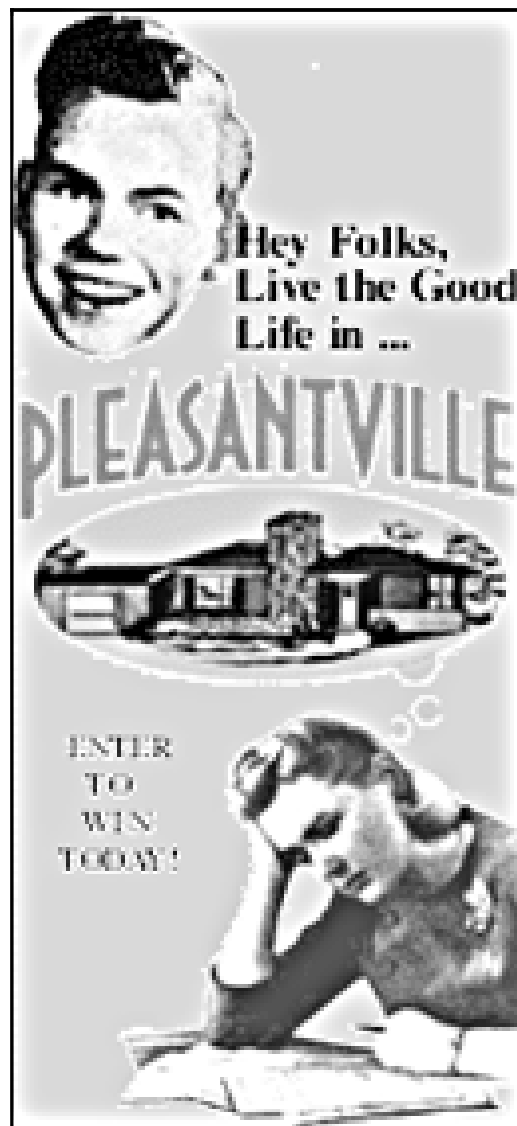
I did, however, find it hard to be satisfied with the simplicity of the film. Since *Forrest Gump*, and perhaps even before that, the cinematic audience has been overly receptive to films where conservative simplicity seems to be the key to success in life. Complexity is thrown out the window in favor of cute phrases and easy solutions.

When David returns to his modern society and his crying, divorced mother, he comforts her with reassurances that everything is going to be all right because they have got such a great life just because they live in modern America. She suddenly stops crying and feels that her son is a bright source of knowledge.

This ending brings up a problematic question. True, we have progressed by huge strides since the stagnancy portrayed by this characterization of mid-century America, but have we progressed enough to honestly say that we've reached the point where it's as good as it gets? Judging by the resolution of this film, we have.

We may not live in such a world of kitsch as portrayed in *Pleasantville* because we have come to accept some of the bad with the good. However, we could stand a stronger injection of color in order to realize there are certain things that civilization as a whole is missing or ignoring to our own detriment. But maybe I am looking for too much complexity in a medium that has become a plastic means of mass escapism.

Pleasantville offers some interesting food for



thought, but it falls short of poignancy because of its glitzy cinematography and simple plot. If you are faced with choice of what to see in Winston-Salem in the next week, choose *Pleasantville* over *Antz*, but go see *PI* if you want to see filmmaking with an edge and an immediacy that is lacking in the contemporary American cinema of plasticity.



Courtesy of www.bigsun.wbs.net

A brother and sister from the 1990s are sucked into their television into 1950s suburbia and must adjust to the traditional values of that time.

Choral concert sings of variety

By Robert Shaw
Contributing Reviewer

Led by the ever-popular and highly talented Brian Gorelick, the Concert Choir and Choral Union's concert Oct. 22 was no disappointment.

I have always been thoroughly impressed with the care these choirs take in preparing their

programs, especially in the liberal arts environment. This concert was no exception.

The Choral Union, open to anyone in the university community interested in great choral music, started the concert. Like the Concert Choir that would follow it, the Choral Union presented a wonderfully diverse selection of pieces.

The choir opened the evening with "Brother James' Air," a traditional song arranged by American Gordon Jacob. The enthusiasm and musicianship that gives pieces like this such an extra dimension was brought out quite well.

The choir followed the first work with "David's Lamentation" by William Billings, an 18th century English composer, "Absalom, fili mi" by Josquin des Pres of the Renaissance period, "What do we know about life" by Dan Locklair, a professor of music and the composer in residence.

These works fall more in the tradition of classical choral music. The choir's commitment to spanning the range of the modern era of choral music in the Euro-American tradition is commendable.

Many music lovers feel timid at expanding their knowledge before Bach's time or after Brahms' time, but the Josquin and Locklair works, with a good performance, are good examples of very accessible and artistic pieces from these neglected periods.

Particularly important is coming to understand the well-crafted music of our period, and I firmly believe that Locklair's music reflects in a very unique and satisfying way the spirit of our environment. The choir ended with a rousing performance of the spiritual "Ain't a That Good News."

The Concert Choir followed the

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first group with a similarly provocative program.

This group, which tours with great success every spring, really puts a satisfying polish on their work, and this concert continued that level of performance.

The first selection was "The Lamentations of Jeremiah-Part I" by English composer Thomas Tallis of the English Renaissance period. It is unfortunate that Tallis is not appreciated more by the listening public, and I applaud Gorelick's continuing commitment to this English genius.

After Tallis, the Concert Choir left the ages of yore to present a series of five pieces from our own century.

Again, I stress the unfortunate circumstance that the listening public generally eschews modern music. That word, "modern," almost seems to conjure up disaster in the dreams of concert planners and music listeners alike.

Well, this performance of the final five works was no disaster, with perhaps a few lapses in intonation and diction. Given the difficulty of the music, the overall effect of the performance far outweighed technical considerations; thank goodness that pieces and performances such as these exist to debunk the stereotype of music from this century being inaccessible.

The group of works that ended the program included "The Evening Primrose" by English composer Benjamin Britten, "Nigra Sum" by cellist Pablo Casals, "Lamentaciones de Jeremias Propheta" by Alberto Ginastera, "The Grave of John Brown, the Dentist" by Phillip Rhodes, and "EPITAPH" by Locklair.

This country truly is experiencing a great renaissance of its own in choral music and great choruses are becoming increasingly popular among serious listeners. Attending concerts like these will give any student a great start in a lifetime of contemplating this unique and growing medium.