Cantus brings classics and pop

All-male vocal ensemble performs at Brooks Center Tuesday

By Paul Hyde
Arts Writer
phyde@greenvilleonline.com

The all-male vocal ensemble Cantus is nothing if not versatile.

On its Tuesday program at Clemson's Brooks Center, a listener will find Schubert and Mendelssohn sharing space with music by U2, the Beatles and Michael Jackson.

"We've always included some popular songs," says Aaron Humble, a tenor with the nine-member group. "We really enjoying singing popular music, and people expect it because of the male ensembles who've come before us, such as the King's Singers and Chanticleer."

He adds: "We place a value on accessibility."

The Minneapolis-based *a cappella* group was last seen in the Upstate in December at the Peace Center, performing its poignant and critically acclaimed work "All Is Calm," about the legendary World War I Christmas truce of 1914.

At the Brooks Center, Cantus will present "On the Shoulders of Giants," featuring about two dozen shorter pieces arranged thematically rather than chronologically.

It makes for some interesting juxtapositions.

A section about shipwrecks places the modern Estonian composer Veljo Tormis' "Incantatio Maris Estuosi" next to Canadian folk singer Gordon Lightfoot's "Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald."

A section of religious pieces jumps from the 16th-century Spanish composer Tomas Luis de Victoria to 20th-century America composer Randall Thompson.

The program then leaps back to the 19th century for some works by Grieg, Mendelssohn and Schubert inspired by nature.

The concert touches on national identity with Sibelius' "Finlandia," while a series of pieces on the theme of commemoration features U2's "MLK."

The concluding series of songs about love includes the Beatles' "I Want to Hold Your Hand" and Michael Jackson's "Heal the World."

Cantus, a professional ensemble since 2000, performs about 75 concerts a year, says Humble, speaking by phone from Fort Myers, Fla., where the group is touring before heading to Clemson.

Cantus recently performed in Joplin, Mo., the city that was struck by a devastating tornado last May. Humble says the group learned a poignant lesson about the value of the arts.

"The Joplin series on which we performed has seen nothing but an increase in attendance," Humble says. "Even when people are focusing on fundamentals, trying to rebuild, they haven't forgotten about the arts because that's an opportunity for them to escape."

Arts Writer Paul Hyde can be reached at 864-298-4004.



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