Chorale delivers a grand night of music at opener

By Paul Hyde
Arts Writer
phyde@greenvilleonline.com

CONCERT REVIEW

Mezzo-soprano Elizabeth Bishop's lovely "It's a Grand Night for Singing" perfectly expressed the mood at this past weekend's Greenville Chorale concert at the Peace Center.

It was indeed a fine evening for those who love choral music as the 150-voice Chorale, under the astute direction of Bingham Vick, presented "Some Enchanted Evening," a musical tour of some of the favorite songs and choruses of Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Bishop, a Greenville native and Metropolitan Opera singer who served as primary soloist for the concert, offered radiant accounts of several songs, perhaps most memorably "You'll Never Walk Alone."

Bishop exhibited a rich, lustrous voice on "Hello Young Lovers" and soared on "Climb Every Mountain." Bishop also provided engaging commentary throughout the evening.

The concert was something of a change for the Chorale, which usually opens its season with one of the great classical masterworks of the 18th or 19th centuries.

For this concert, the Chorale not only let down its hair but also donned cowboy hats during its "Oklahoma!" medley.

The ensemble presented attractive arrangements from other big Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals such as "South Pacific," "The King and I" and "The Sound of Music."

Solos and duets alternated with choruses. The Chorale brought its accustomed musical virtues to bear on this pops-oriented performance. Diction was crisp and the ensemble's sound was robust, full-bodied and well-balanced.

The group delivered such numbers as the title song of "Oklahoma!" with satisfying gusto.

Several other Greenville solo voices were featured, including the resonant baritone of David Parker and the ringing tenor of Grayson Sloan.

High school student Leyly Bagherof, one of the Chorale's Young Artists, offered a lyrical, heartfelt "If I Loved You."

Lisa Barksdale contributed a spirited "Mister Snow" while Laura Morris sang a beautiful "We Kiss in a Shadow" (a duet with Sloan).

Kathryn Knauer absolutely sparkled, visually and vocally, on "A Wonderful Guy."

Vick's tempos were notably expansive, which may have tested the stamina of his singers but also placed these familiar tunes in a new light.

The concert was packed to the rafters with lovers of choral music.