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Music

‘Serenade!’ choral festival floods Strathmore with song



Pro Musica-Magnolia from Slovakia was among the groups performing in the “Serenade! Washington DC Choral Festival.” (Courtesy of Pro Musica-Magnolia)

By Cecelia Porter

The “Serenade!” international choir festival filled the stage at Bethesda’s Strathmore Music Center on Sunday. Directed by several choral conductors, the groups had performed at the Kennedy Center’s Millennium Stage, as well as in Alexandria and Damascus, Annapolis and Frederick, Md.

The event was this year’s grand finale of a week-long international series of choral concerts. These were capped by a multi-chorale performance, the fifth such event co-presented by Classical Movements, directed by Neeta Helms. This

organization thinks globally. Sunday's choral groups hailed from Cuba, Slovakia, Australia, Canada and the United States.

The Eya Ensemble began the program, singing two anonymous medieval works. A chantlike work by Hildegard von Bingen, a 12th-century abbess and visionary, resounded through the hall with clearly sculpted phrasing.

The children's choirs sang with beautiful, pure head-voice timbres that were strong without the ear-grating fortes heard in some Broadway musicals.

But the program's lack of texts meant that the audience had no clue about the meaning of the music being performed, despite some lovely moments throughout the afternoon. That was especially unfortunate in the performance of Cuba's Coro Entrevozes, which was unusually reserved in its dynamic rhythms. A small instrumental group of typically Caribbean guiros, maracas and hand drums would have added some pep.

For the finale, Doreen Rao took on a tall order, vigorously conducting a massed chorus of all the singers.

Porter is a freelance writer.