

## Review

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### Reviewed work:

Karen Ahlquist, ed. 2006. *Chorus and Community*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press. 336 pp.  
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by Stephanie Conn

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———, dir. 2002. *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meaning in Latin Popular Music*. New York : Routledge.

CATHERINE GAUTHIER MERCIER

Karen Ahlquist, ed. 2006. *Chorus and Community*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press. 336 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-252-03037-6 (cloth and compact disc).

One evening in the austere stillness of the Wesleyan University Chapel, I was one of thirty-odd strangers who gathered for a workshop in shape-note choral singing during the Society for Ethnomusicology's annual conference. Hunched over a book of idiosyncratic notation with another disoriented singer, I felt both challenged and exhilarated, sensing I had come home in this unfamiliar musical and geographical terrain. Amidst the bustle of an academic conference, this simple act of music-making was a sort of oasis and an acute reminder of how choral singing can be a powerful intersection of communal purpose and affective musical pleasure.

*Chorus and Community* is a collection of thirteen essays that examine the choir as a musical organization, but also as a crucible for social, cultural, political, personal, and interpersonal change. The focus is mainly on Western European culture, but nevertheless it turns to such varied groups as students, church-goers, cultural communities, trades people, and special interest groups. In every case there is evidence of what contributor Gregory Barz calls "the unique meaning of community that is shared, practiced, and performed" (34).

There is much room for discussion of editor Karen Ahlquist's introductory statement that singing is "an activity seemingly as natural as breathing" (1), even if she counters that with "and as easily taken for granted." Perhaps because of the unfortunate assumption that people would sing anyway for fun, choral singing is often belittled as the province of talented amateurs. In part 5 of this volume, "In the Western Tradition," contributor Rosalynd Smith explores this paradox with her paper "Symphonic Choirs: Understanding the Borders of Professionalism," examining the fine line drawn between amateur and professional in the choral context. Paid instrumentalists often share the stage with singers who rarely can count on music as their main source of income, but, despite this economic disparity, no less musical competency is expected from the choir than from the orchestra. Smith's article looks at the historical and social factors that might have contributed to this current situation, one that might be peculiar to Western classical music. Part 5 also includes a contribution by editor Karen Ahlquist, "Men and Women of the Chorus: Music, Governance, and Social Models in Nineteenth-Century German-Speaking Europe," in which she questions the socio-historic role played by choral organizations in the cause of gender equality.

Ahlquist is well positioned to curate the first scholarly collection of essays on this topic. She has experienced choral life from both sides of the podium, having conducted university, school, community, and professional ensembles,

as well as participating in choirs as a singer. Her other scholarly work explores the related theme of how culture can shape the social and cultural life of a time and place as well as reflecting it; Ahlquist's doctoral dissertation provided the basis of her monograph *Democracy at the Opera: Music, Theater, and Culture in New York City, 1815–60*.

Recent world news has featured the story of how one youth choir became a catalyst for the intersection of song and politics: in October 2007, the members of the Diyarbakir Yenisehir Municipality Children's Choir were tried in Turkish court for the offence of singing "Ey Raqip" (Hey Enemy), a song associated with the Kurdish separatist group, PKK. The idea that a choir can be an instrument of agency for political or racial minority groups is explored in part 3, "Minority Identities," and Part 4, "The Activist Chorus." Helen Metzelaar's fascinating paper "Spiritual Singing Brings in the Money: The Fisk Jubilee Singers Tour Holland in 1877" details a circumstance in which black artists made inroads to white European culture while negotiating expectations of authenticity raised by their group's identity. Jill Strachan's piece, "The Voice Empowered: Harmonic Convergence of Music and Politics in the GLBT Movement," deals with contemporary use of the choir as a literal and metaphorical voice for an overtly socio-political cause.

An accompanying CD provides musical examples for some of the articles, grounding the reader in the context of their respective articles if not always making a particular point. In the case of the relatively unknown singing practice of a Sardinian religious order profiled in Bernard Lortat-Jacob's article "Concord and Discord: Singing Together in a Sardinian Brotherhood," the musical excerpts are a tremendously useful reference point for the singers' own discussion of style and aesthetics.

The articles in *Chorus and Community* look far beyond the choir to deal with such broad issues as identity construction, gender, race, and authenticity. Ahlquist's volume yields insights into the way our musical activities mirror and reinforce underlying cultural structures, and raises questions about the effects of choral singing as a performative art and as a social act both worldwide and here at home. Canada is, after all, a country of choirs, with a long-running national choral radio competition and several choir festivals of international stature. With so much to be investigated, it seems that this discourse has just begun.

STEPHANIE CONN

Beate Perrey, ed. 2007. *The Cambridge Companion to Schumann*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. xx, 302 pp. ISBN 978-0-521-78341-5 (cloth) and ISBN 978-0-521-78950-9 (paper).

Anthologies of writings in English on Schumann are, of course, not new, and Gerald Abraham's *Schumann: A Symposium* (1952) and Alan Walker's *Robert Schumann: The Man and His Music* (1972) set a high standard for such studies.