

Art—Music—Theater

Puerto Rican Singers

Augusto Rodríguez Conducts Chorus for Program at MIT

By Jules Wolfers

Much charming music was dispensed by the Chorus of the University of Puerto Rico last night in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Humanities Series at Huntington Hall. Under the brisk direction of Augusto Rodríguez, the attractive young singers combined high entertainment with solid musicianly values.

Until the singing actually starts, their platform manner reminds one more of a rehearsal than of a public concert. The young ladies are dressed alike in fetching patterned cotton skirts and white blouses, but the skirts' colors are like Joseph's coat—varied and many. Sole bow to formality by the men are black trousers and shoes. Each wears a shirt in a color of his own choice—red, green, blue, gray—open at the neck and without tie.

Mr. Rodríguez, in impeccable tails, stands out in high relief as he chats to this one and that.

There is much sounding of pitch-pipes and many attempts to ensure accuracy by humming the starting tones. Finally the leader is satisfied, and with one final little admonitory toot the pitch-pipe goes back in pocket, a few preliminary beats are given, and the chorus is off.

But whatever methods the conductor may use, and whatever oddities one may observe (such as having one of the singers serve as an animated conductor's music stand) it makes no difference. Results are what count, and in results this unaccompanied aggregation ranks high indeed.

Opening with sacred music, the 30 choristers showed the fine style and execution in a group that placed a beautiful Palestrina motet next to Randall Thompson's "Alleluia," and a traditional "Veshomeru" from the Hebrew Friday Evening Service beside a contemporary "Kyrie eleison" by Rodríguez.

If the slightly husky Hispanic choral tone was not quite as effective in two English madrigals by Bennet and Purcell, the succeeding folk songs were altogether delightful. A Belgian example (freely arranged by Gevaert), the traditional Palestinian "Tumbah" (a vocalized dance-song without words), and the Spanish "Romance de Don Rodrigo" by the 16th-century folklore expert, Salinas—all were done to a "T."

After intermission came stirring Latin-American songs by Lecuona, Parra, and anonymous composers, with the final group made up of Puerto Rican folk music, together with works by Campos, Mr. Rodríguez himself, and Hernández. In addition to his talent as composer and conductor, Mr. Rodríguez is an arranger of no mean ability, as several of his settings showed.

The encores were many, in proportion to the hearers' enthusiasm. Among the extras was one that afforded some beautiful solo singing from an alto; in fact, the whole alto section sang with remarkable timbre.

The singers will give another free concert this evening in Sanders Theater under the auspices of Harvard University.

PUERTO RICAN CHORUS GIVES FINE CONCERT

University Singers Vigorous, Crisp

BY JOHN HASKINS

The chorus of the University of Puerto Rico under Augusto Rodríguez sang an a capella concert at the Pan American Union last night which was notable for a vigorous execution and unusual repertoire.

With one exception, Poulenc, the composers represented on the announced program were all native to the two Americas. Incapacity of a soloist forced a substitution for Poulenc, and a more grateful piece by Gretchaninoff was heard.

Rodríguez is a singularly dynamic conductor who works hard with his singers and insists on the highest standards of crispness in execution. Refinement of tone is not an outstanding characteristic of the chorus, but many an over-refined chorus might envy this group their energy and vivacity of delivery. Various sections stand out in quality; seldom do we hear altos of such dark and almost hard tone, or of such intensity, or basses of such deep and satisfying richness.

In five groups, the program dwelt on modern church music, contemporary North American choral works, Negro songs of both Americas, Latin-American folk and popular songs, and popular songs of Puerto Rico. The Latin-American and Puerto Rican songs were sung in costume on the last half of the program, and were in many ways the most memorable of the evening. Languid or playful, militant or sad, these songs were persuasive in expression and sung with complete authority.

Several soloists distinguished themselves throughout the evening, especially in the folk and popular repertoire. The conductor was listed as arranger for several of these.

A program of choral music entirely devoted to the compositions of this century is a departure from college group standards which can be greeted with relief. Interest in the material never flagged, and the chorus sang each number as tho they believed in it.

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