

April 21, 2014

Easter set to music



The Hindu

Conducted by Augustine Paul with gifted pianist Edwin Roy on the piano, a brilliant 12-piece string orchestra with many school students and Nina Simon on the flute, the evening's music and message was compered by Ravi Santosham and Jayanthi Prabhakar. Photo: R. Ravindran

The MMA choir's evening of songs was a beautiful way to celebrate Lent

Religious music works on the premise that God wants the best. And the choir of the Madras Musical Association did its best to oblige. For many years now, the MMA has made the singing of Lenten, Passiontide and Easter music a part of its tradition, and so it was at St. Christopher's College of Education on Easter eve. Organised by Santosham Chest Hospital as a fundraiser for Home of Hope that cares for orphaned girls, the concert featured two cantatas and a mass that chronicled Christ's journey from Palm Sunday through Good Friday to Easter.

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Opening with John Henry Maunder's *Olivet to Calvary*, one of the English composer and organist's most well-known cantatas, the choir sang 'On The Way To Jerusalem', underlining the high sense of theatre that marked Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The operatic tone applied well to both the zenith and nadir of Passion Week when the very people of the city who celebrated Christ turned out again in numbers to condemn him. The song also combined Maunder's fine musical style and prodigious technique that made him a well-known Victorian composer.

The part commemorating Maundy Thursday was drawn from Joseph Haydn's *Missa Brevis in B-flat Major*. The special quality of the 'Benedictus' was proclaimed in a sweet solo by Anisha Simon followed by an extensive organ solo. The singing of the Passion was drawn again from *Olivet to Calvary*, with four soloists describing the journey to Calvary, interspersed with choral hymns. Tenor Ebenezer Arunkumar, baritones Pramod V. and Kingslin Ponbhabha and soprano Sangita Santosham held the audience's attention with harmonic twists and melodic runs that mirrored the anguish of Good Friday.

The musicians were light on the score, never belying the gravity of the Passion. For a group so young, their fine textures and fast tempos anchored by good technique lent richness to the concert.

The joys of Easter were proclaimed manifold — by legendary songwriter Joe E. Parks' cantata *Up From The Grave* and the inimitable 'Hallelujah Chorus' from Handel's *Messiah*. Nina's flute sang the melody while the soloists Anupa Paul in 'They Have Taken the Lord', Sharon and Shilvi in 'Go Tell The World' and Aishwariya Davis and Sherene Lazarus in 'My Lord and My God' sang with a clarity that was balanced out by the resonance that sprang back from the high-vaulted ceiling. The evening ended with Henry Francis Lyte's popular 'Abide With Me' — a fitting tribute to Easter and the music inspired by it.