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Modern Masters

By [Lee Hartman](#) *Tue, Nov 17, 2009*



Let me begin by saying Octarium is an exceptionally talented ensemble with stunning voices, synergy and stage presence to spare. There is no place to hide in this ensemble and the singers need not worry about that, as each is magnificent.

I was very excited to hear Octarium's performance on Saturday, November 14



having heard nothing but good things about it. Let me begin by saying Octarium is an exceptionally talented ensemble with stunning voices, synergy and stage presence to spare. There is no place to hide in this ensemble and the singers need not worry about that, as each is magnificent. Artistic director Krista Lang Blackwood certainly has created a tight ensemble of the highest caliber.

I say this because I was ultimately frustrated by their performance and that was purely the fault of the program.

The pieces reveled in tameness. There were no edges, nothing fast, nothing uneasy. Everything was so polished, so refined and so attractive that all I can remember is an aesthetic whitewash of innocuous prettiness. With a program called "Modern Masters" I was expecting more adventuresome works but I do realize that this is the type of music that enables the best possible sounding choir. A wider variety of pieces exist; other choirs have performed them often and performed them well (for instance Chanticleer with Augusta Read Thomas or a Reich piece performed by Synergy Vocals). Octarium is certainly comparable to those other more established ensembles on sheer talent alone - but the repertoire must back them up.

Granted Blackwoods' project of asking modern composers to choose one of their own pieces especially for Octarium yielded these results, so some of the blame lay with the composers in only choosing "pretty pieces." All the performed works were strong individually, but bundled together on one program greatly diminished their impact.

Of note, I found the layers of female voice textures in Steve Danyew's *On Green Mountain* to be very effective and Leah Hamilton Jenkins' solo in Stephen Hatfield's *Double Shot* was earnestly sung.

REVIEW:

Octarium

Modern Masters

Saturday, November 14, 2009

Visitation Church, Kansas City, MO

For more information visit www.octarium.org

Top photo by Mark Hutchinson

By *Lee Hartman*



Traditional and New Classical Contributor

Lee Hartman holds degrees from the University of Missouri-Kansas City (D.M.A., M.M.) and the University of Delaware (B.M.). At the University of Delaware, he received a Dean's Scholarship position enabling him to pursue an individually designed academic program combining music education and composition. At the University of Missouri-Kansas City he served for three years as the Assistant Director to Musica Nova, the conservatory's new music ensemble, while teaching a variety of composition classes.

In 2007 he was invited to both the Iceland Academy of the Arts in Reykjavík, Iceland and the Sichuan Conservatory in Chengdu, China to give lectures and master classes in composition. In 2007-08 he was Visiting Instructor in music theory at the University of Delaware where he taught freshman music theory, honors music theory, graduate orchestration, and private composition. In the summer of 2009, Hartman served as an orchestra manager for the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble and Aspen Opera Theater Center for various performances. He serves on the National Executive Committee of the Society of Composers, Inc. as Submissions Coordinator. His primary composition instructors include James Mobberley, Chen Yi, Zhou Long, Paul Rudy, John Beall, and Jennifer Margaret Barker.

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