

Social Band's Herculean task will reverberate into the future

By Dan Wolfe

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BURLINGTON – Finally I have heard Social Band's expansive program of choral music commissioned from 25 Vermont composers in their Vermont Composers Project. Many of the composers were writing choral music for the first time, but of the works performed, there is not a loser in the entire program. Several of the more difficult works – and I am guessing they are more difficult simply in knowing the composers – will be added to the program as they are learned. I don't have any idea how long they have been preparing this program but to be able so well to realize what the composers wrote on the page, even though they had the benefit of some of them attending rehearsals to give suggestions and/or approval, was a Herculean task.

The bottom line is that Social Band has accomplished what it set out to do: bring new works by Vermont composers into the repertoire for choral singing, with a slight extra nod to shaped-note singing and its traditions in a number of the works. The texts were chosen from a vast array of personal likes of the composers, and sometimes were also written by the composers. One remarkable first effort was the work completed by Rachel Bissex before her death. The text for which she chose to write music reads like a *précis* of an interview I did with her more than a year ago.

Social Band has made a major achievement with this series of commissions, and they may have impacted choral singing in Vermont for some time to come. I would hope that in addition to any recordings they make of these works that they find a way to get them all published by one publishing house. Each and every piece is worthy of further performances, so I hope that, in addition to their touring these pieces throughout Vermont through October of this year, they will find audiences farther afield both for their performances as well as the music that they are currently performing.

My hat is off to them for their achievement and to the composers for having taken up the commissions. This is what the phrase "Made in Vermont" can mean.

Kudos!