



Reflective choruses of transcendent beauty

CONCERT

Little Match Girl Passion
Theatre of Voices
Winthrop Hall
Review: William Yeoman

“I don’t think I’ve ever been so moved by a new, and largely unheralded, composition as I was by David Lang’s *Little Match Girl Passion*, which is unlike any music I know.”

So said the Washington Post’s music critic and Pulitzer juror Tim Page on the occasion of Lang’s winning last year’s Pulitzer Prize for Music for his extraordinary work for four voices and percussion based on Hans Christian Andersen’s children’s story and J.S. Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*.

Commissioned by Carnegie Hall

especially for the Theatre of Voices and its director, Paul Hillier, *The Little Match Girl Passion* intersperses an often dissonant and increasingly agitated narrative with reflective choruses of transcendent beauty.

That this work is a modern masterpiece was made abundantly clear by Hillier and his singers in Wednesday night’s superlative performance, in which each performer became a suffering individual in an indifferent universe

The final chorus, in which the words “Rest soft, daughter, rest soft” floated into the darkness studded with twinkling percussion, was especially effective — a musical coup de grace after so much emotional intensity.

Preceding the *Little Match Girl Passion* was a selection of works

from medieval times to the present, the bare intervals and organic embellishments of the 12th century Notre Dame school sounding almost as modern as Steve Reich’s *Proverb*, in which the Theatre of Voices was joined by local musicians Adam Pinto and Emily Green-Armytage on electric organs and Robyn Sarti and Paul Tanner on vibraphones.

Guillaume Dufay’s renaissance *Gloria*, with its notes and short phrases thrown from one voice to the next with the vitality and richness of pealing of bells, provided an ideal opening work.

