

KidsPost



MUSIC CENTER AT STRATHMORE

Music

Masterly Young Voices With a Touch of Honey

By CECILIA PORTER
Special to The Washington Post

Representing more than 100 area schools, the Children's Chorus of Washington collaborated with the vocal ensemble Sweet Honey in the Rock on Saturday for an audience of enthralled youngsters at Strathmore Hall. Conducted primarily by its founder and artistic director, Joan Gregoryk, the chorus filled the concert's first half with music by Johann Sebastian Bach, Aaron Copland and gospel composer Keith Hampton, among others. In every aspect, the chorus easily rivals the finest children's choirs anywhere —

even Austria's Vienna Choir Boys.

After an exuberant version of a section from Leonard Bernstein's "Mass" by the entire 150-member chorus (with tenor Robert Baker) the singers appeared separately in three sections divided by age: the Treble (8 to 12), Bel Canto (11 to 13) and Concert (11 to 18) choruses. And they were as disciplined in parading on and off the stage (several times) as they were polished, dedicated and attentive in musicmaking. Among the many striking feats of the day was the Bel Canto's agility, precise German diction and balance in an intricate duet ("Wir eilen mit schwachen, doch emsigen

Schritten") from Bach's BWV 78 Cantata conducted by Michael Wu. The Treble singers sparked in an arrangement sung in Cajun French, and the Concert Chorus excelled in a Latin psalm setting by Rupert Lang.

Engaging the audience with West African chant refrains and jazzy riffs, the Sweet Honey sextet (one member did signing) was its justly fabled self not only in its stunning command of blues, gospel, rap and other styles and its vocal imitations of instruments, but also in the causes — civil rights, peace — conveyed in their texts. The 2½-hour program ended with everyone singing together.



BY DWIGHT CARTER

The Children's Chorus of Washington and the vocal group Sweet Honey in the Rock. The two ensembles performed a superb and engaging joint concert Saturday.