

A SAMPLING OF REVIEWS FROM THE DIRECTOR'S PAST LIVES

43 Member Sullivan Unit's Music Radiant – The Sullivan Chamber Ensemble . . . presented a beautifully prepared collection of 19th century religious works Sunday night in the St. Joseph's Convent Chapel. At its best, this Milwaukee troupe organized and directed by Charles Sullivan produces a remarkably professional sound – accurate pitch, good textural balance and assured interpretive accord. . . . If there's a single quality that stands out in Sullivan's group overall, it is this spirit of enthusiasm and confidence. It magnified technical accomplishment to artistic achievement.

Lawrence B. Johnson (Sentinel) Oct. 30, 1972

The Sullivan Chamber Ensemble fused strong choral singing and concentrated orchestral force Sunday night for a sweeping performance of Anton Bruckner's "Mass in F Minor." Nearly 400 persons were on hand at St. Joseph's Convent Chapel for the rare revival of Bruckner's radiant mass by 60 musicians under the direction of Charles Sullivan. . . . This is grand, heavenly soaring music from the pen of a devoutly religious man. Sullivan caught the full scope of Bruckner's symphonic conception and its realization was dramatically moving. Choral textures flowed smoothly one into another; the big climaxes came through with sometimes overwhelming thrust. . . . Sullivan opened his program with a luxuriant reading of the Adagio from Saint-Saens' "Third Symphony" and prefaced the mass with Bruckner's a cappella "Os Justi," glowingly performed.

Lawrence B. Johnson (Sentinel) Nov. 19, 1973

Sullivan One of City's Finest – The Sullivan Chamber Ensemble opened its 1974-'75 season Sunday night with an all-Mozart program that showcased a shining coloratura soprano and a chorus that ranks among the city's best. . . . Surely, there is no more exacting test of a choir than the sublime church music of Mozart, three of whose works formed the heart of this concert heard by about 300 persons in Vogel Hall of the Performing Arts Center. Conductor Charles Sullivan has put together a 30 voice ensemble with true sopranos who can handle the high range without abandoning tone, and tenors who also sing out at full strength.

Lawrence B. Johnson (Sentinel) Oct. 14, 1974

Sullivan Ensemble Brilliant – The Sullivan Chamber Ensemble transformed St. Joseph Convent Chapel into a choral theater Sunday night in creating one of the season's most ravishing musical events. For the season debut of his 23 voice chorus, director Charles Sullivan devised an a cappella program that was no more in conception than in execution your run of the mill choral concert. It hardly produced a sense of concert at all, but rather a brilliant piece of theater.

Lawrence B. Johnson (Sentinel) Nov. 15, 1976

Sullivans End Season With Hallmark Variety – As freshly as it began last fall, the Sullivan Chamber Ensemble closed its 1976-'77 season Sunday night with a polished, engagingly varied concert at Redeemer Lutheran Church. Surely no musical organization of any size in Milwaukee pumps as much new blood into its repertoire with every program as the 23 singers and occasional instrumentalists directed by Charles Sullivan.

Lawrence B. Johnson (Sentinel) May 23, 1977

Concert Design is Work of Art – It really doesn't take a ton of effort to put together a concert – not, at least, the way most people plan them. You take a snippet of the old, a tiny touch of the new, and lots of mainstream stuff, and you've got a basic, slightly dull, but nicely structured classical concert. Figure out where to put the intermission, keep it under two hours, and presto, the task is done. But then there are concerts planned by musicians such as Charles Sullivan, concerts where each work on display flows into the next with a kind of inevitability, without a typical, usual selection in sight. The music zips through time, from Bach's baroque to Rorem's today, in a way that reveals a curiosity and interest for every sound, every period. Easy tastes aren't catered to, but challenged. . . . It never for a moment was an ordinary concert. . . . the singers turned the evening into a delightful study of fascinating music.

Louise Kenngott (Journal) Oct. 17, 1977

THE BEST OF '77 – New music, old music, odd music, but always fresh music – that was standard fare in countless presentations through the year by the Sullivan Chamber Ensemble. Charles Sullivan's boldly imaginative programming, his dramatic approach to performance and high level of musicianship made joyous adventures of concert after concert – crowned by Benjamin Britten's cantata "St. Nicholas," with tenor Joseph Allen.

Lawrence B. Johnson (Sentinel) Dec. 30, 1977

Ensemble Keeps Show on the Move – One thing about the Sullivan Chamber Ensemble concerts: they are never sluggish. . . . an evening with director Charles Sullivan is snappy. . . . The evening's fare provided the variety of styles and epochs that Sullivan audiences have come to expect over the last seven seasons. The group began with a startler that prompted someone near me to whisper, "Oh, this is the weird one."

Roxane Orgill (Journal) May 15, 1978

Sullivan Group Equal to the Challenge – The Sullivan Chamber Ensemble is really a multi-purpose group. It is a chorus that sings any music from any era. It is a showcase for local solo artists, instrumental and vocal, who otherwise would have a difficult time finding a stage. And as it proved Sunday when it performed at Redeemer Lutheran Church, it is one of the city's leading performers of contemporary music. . . . Sullivan stands alone as an organization willing to challenge a general audience with music it might not want to hear. Over and over its director has searched out modern choral works, and its small band has learned the crazy variety of new vocal techniques. It hasn't been easy to do that and build an audience at the same time. But in terms of choosing a repertory that might force the group to mature in double time, it is a move that has paid off. *Louise Kenngott (Journal) Feb 26, 1979*

ACDA 1979 – American Choral Directors Association National Convention – No doubt every president is pleased to represent his state at the one national ACDA convention that falls during his term of office. But no WCDA president before me was ever as proud to be from Wisconsin as I was following your performance yesterday in Kansas City . . . Your concert there was an event of great musical significance. You sang literature unfamiliar to most but now beloved by many. You demonstrated the highest standards of technique and musicality alike. Best of all, your presentation was so bold and exciting as to challenge the imagination of all of us who conduct.

Dr. John Windh, President, Wisconsin Choral Directors Association

THE BEST OF '79 – Much great music was created in small ways through the year. At the first and final curtains of 1979, the Sullivan Chamber Ensemble's two dozen choral voices sounded their exemplary best, venturing in new directions as usual and dependably singing with equal parts of vitality and polish.

Lawrence B. Johnson (Sentinel) Dec. 29, 1979

Ensemble makes the Bachs resound – The celebration of a famous musical family tree revealed many baroque branches at Sunday's Sullivan Chamber Ensemble concert. . . . "Bach Family Reunion" toasted no less than 10 composers of that remarkably prodigious family and one sly imposter, who crashed the party just for fun. Conductor Charles Sullivan and his charges proved right at home hosting the affair at a filled Redeemer Lutheran Church. The baroque appeared almost second nature to these performers. The motion, spirit and surprising drama of the music was vividly captured in their varied performances of largely obscure choral works sung in German. *Kevin Lynch (Journal) May 19, 1980*

"African Sanctus" heavenly – "African Sanctus" had its world premiere seven years ago, and shortly after was recorded on the Philips label under Fanshawe's supervision. Not surprisingly, it was the venturesome Charles Sullivan who finally brought Milwaukee the first-hand experience of this complicated and strange music, and he delivered it in vivid, idiomatic fashion.

Lawrence B. Johnson (Sentinel) Mar 3, 1980

'Daniel' is a Christmas gift well worth receiving – It might have been worthy of Hollywood in the glory days of those biblical epics, but surely "The Play of Daniel" unveiled Wednesday night at St. John Cathedral measured up to the spectacle of its 12th century origins. For the second successive Christmas season, St. John has conferred the gift of the Daniel pageant on a community that must have been on very good behavior to warrant such a treat. The new production is a triumph of creative spirit and theatrical organization. In re-creating the medieval music-drama, general director Charles Q. Sullivan has marshaled a huge, consistently excellent cast of singers and instrumentalists and put the entire cathedral at their dramatic disposal. The result is sensational theater, visually as well as musically.

Lawrence B. Johnson (Sentinel) Dec 11, 1986

THE BEST OF '88 – Cheers: For the consistently creative programming of Sullivan Ensemble director Charles Q. Sullivan, who cheerfully admits that he'll have to live "to the year 3000" to be able to perform all the concert programs he comes up with.

Nancy Miller (Sentinel) Dec 1988

Musical introduction to the real St. Nick creatively merges medieval and modern – Charles Q. Sullivan, conductor and director, introduced "The Plays of Nicholas" a year ago. It remains a solemn, elemental pageant of faith. Sullivan's bold idea was to segue from "Getron" to the Britten cantata, from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, and unify them in a stark style of movement and singing. It was a wonderful idea last year, and improved execution makes it look even better now. . . . The 31-voice adult chorus and five boy sopranos sang both works from memory. Their fine pitch and straight tone let the haunting harmonies of the 12th century organum blossom into resonance, and they rendered its deceptively tricky rhythms crisply. They warmed up the sound and were more flexible for the more Romantic Britten score, but not too much. Their restraint, which of course was enforced by their conductor, helped to unify the two works and keep the pairing plausible.

Tom Strini (Journal) Dec 7, 1990