

FANCY NAME, BIG VOICES

13 centuries of music sung with passion

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When the 30 singers from an independent chorus called Schola Cantorum on Hudson present their 15th anniversary concert this weekend at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jersey City, they will be singing songs of 13 centuries.

The selections range from an original Shaker melody called "The Gift" to a pop tune by Sting entitled "Fields of Gold"; songs from the 12th century to the 21st century; songs in French and Spanish and Latin, but mostly in English; songs that could not be more obscure, and songs that could not be more familiarly American: "Tonight" from West Side Story and even "Home on the Range."

The one thing common to the arias and anthems, ballads and blues, canticles and cantatas that Schola Cantorum on Hudson has been performing for the past decade and a half, according to Deborah Simpkin King, founder and artistic director, is that they are not just pretty songs.

"Pretty is not what we're about," she said in the sanctuary of St. Paul's where the concert will take place. "The music is about passion, about moving people, about having an impact on people's lives."

King clearly has a passion for music. Her father was a pianist in a jazz trio, and she showed such an early aptitude for music that she says her family just expected her to make it her life's work which is why she initially resisted it.

"I thought this is not putting food on anybody's table, this isn't even balancing their checkbooks."

But as she studied music she has three degrees in it, including a PhD. she realized "I was called in a direct way, in a spiritual sense, to minister through music."

She is quick to add that Schola Cantorum on Hudson is not a religious choir, not tied to any church, synagogue or mosque, and its members come from many faiths, "and some may not be religious at all, I don't know."...