

Hutchins Consort Review, Saramento Community Center Theater, Thursday, February 18, 2010 Sierra Barroza, Sacramento Press

[Sacramento's Community Center Theater](#) came to life Thursday with the beautiful sound of The Hutchins Consort. Presented by [Sacramento Community Concerts](#), the group performed a one-night concert that defied the range of a modern symphony orchestra string section.

[The Hutchins Consort](#) is a unique Southern California-based group that plays eight scaled violins of the violin octet design. These acoustically balanced instruments range from a high treble violin to a low contrabass violin and together cover the musical scale that today's string instrument, the violin, viola, cello and bass, do not.

These eight instruments, three similar to a violin and five upright, were created by Dr. Carleen Hutchins. Dr. Hutchins was able to figure out and master how to create eight different violins that together cover the entire range of written music, while still sounding like violins. Her scientific study of the instruments allowed her to hand craft the eight different instruments that were performed on last night.

In anticipation of hearing these unique instruments I was happy to find that the concert was composed of seven songs, which were also followed by two fun and entertaining encores.

After a quick tune and explanation of the instruments by founder and artistic director Joe McNalley, Contrabass violin, the concert opened with "Prelude in D" by Johannes Sebastian Bach. From the first note their bright and graceful sound filled the theater. The musical talent of the group was obvious; the artistry flowing from one musician to another with great command of their instruments.

They began with two formal classical pieces, the second "Allegro Maestoso" by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, was followed by different musical genres. Their fourth song, for instance, "Fandango after Soler" by resident composer and bass violin Frederick Charlton, brought in a tango feel as the song modernly combined Arabic and Classical music. This song was the first where the group showed they could do more than just play as they plucked their violins and clapped, reminding me of flamenco.

After intermission they opened with a shorter piece called "Hodie Christus Natus Est" by Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck and then lead into their self proclaimed audience favorite. "Summertime" by George Gershwin and arranged by Charlton.

This fun and lively jazz piece got the audience's toes tapping. This bass driven song featured improvised solos by Christopher Woods, treble violinist and comedian in the group, and McNalley on Contrabass.

The last piece brought a whole new atmosphere to the performance proving that comedy can exist in what seems to be a serious instrumental concert. McNalley said that though most musicians decline the chance to improvise during the piece, they would be giving every violinist the opportunity. From there, the "Hungarian Rhapsody" by Franz Liszt and arranged by McNalley, became an exciting piece as Woods performing his solo walked off stage. While off stage he never stopped playing, the audience awaited his return only to see him re-enter from the

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other wing and then jump into the crowd. He sat with the audience, spoke with people and literally ran around the theater while he played.

The excitement of the last song was only enhanced with their encore featuring opera singer Lauren Smith who sang "Bohemian Rhapsody" by Queen, accompanied by The Hutchins Consort. The violinists showcased their talent as not only skilled musicians, but as singers too, as they sang along with Smith during her performance.

For their final encore, McNalley said that it would "feature their resident composer in a new role."

The audience wasn't disappointed as Charlton set down his Bass violin and picked up the mic to sing "Ghost Riders in the Sky" by Stan Jones. The rest of the musicians sang and played along.

The concert ended to huge applause and standing ovations.

The Hutchins Consort had extremely talented musicians. I was astounded at how easy it was to pick out each instrument during each piece. Hands moving feverishly, the musicians swayed with each other, sometimes playing as if they were dueling. They projected an overall well-rounded sound that flowed from one violin to the other.

From here The Hutchins Consort will be traveling back to Southern California. For more information, visit www.hutchinsconsort.org