

And the Oscar goes to the Classic Choral Society

BY JAMES F. COTTER

For the Times Herald-Record

MONTGOMERY – Sunday afternoon before an overflow audience, the Greater Montgomery Chamber Music Series began its season at the Senior Center with a Classic Choral Society concert featuring Oscar-winning songs from the last 73 years. The program's title itself was an invitation, "C'mon Along and Listen to ..." and, appropriately enough, the first song was "Lullaby of Broadway," which won for "Gold Diggers of 1935." Each part of the program was introduced by Jim Zgoda, who briefly summarized each song and its origin.

Led by Janiece Kohler, the group of 56 voices sang a variety of 18 tunes that were truly amazing for their emotional range and sonorous surprises. "Into the West" (2003) from "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" was such a surprise with its haunting lyrics and adagio strains, which the chorus captured with timely articulation and firm intonation.

Almost half the winners presented were from Disney films, starting in the first set with "When You Wish Upon a Star" (1940) from "Pinocchio" and the title song from "Beauty and the Beast" (1991). Both were sung beautifully with lyrical and cadenced lines between high sopranos and solemn bass.

The next set opened with "The Way You Look Tonight" (1936), a

romantic ballad from the jazz age and the movie "Swing Time." Like all the other selections, the arrangement made all the difference as tenors invoked the "breathless charm" of the lady-love.

Two more Disney hits followed, first with the picturesque "Colors of the Wind" (1995) from "Pocahontas." Stephen Schwarz's lyrics create verbal landscape paintings of moon and woods, and Alan Menken's music supplied the mood for contemplation. Another Disney winner followed, "Under the Sea" (1989) from "The Little Mermaid." Sung by a crustacean chorus, the calypso rhythms were clipped, clear and lively.

"My Heart Will Go On" (1997) from "Titanic" added an uplifting note with its anthemlike choral crescendos, and concluded the first half of the concert.

After intermission, "Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing" (1955) announced a splendid emphasis on "Love" that swelled through the whole piece to its "high on a windy hill." Love was also the subject of "Can You Feel the Love Tonight?" (1994) from "The Lion King," with lyrics by Tim Rice and music by Elton John, followed by "When You Believe," a song from the 1998 DreamWorks film "The Prince of Egypt," with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz. The chorus rose to the occasion for both songs, reaching hymnlike heights and singing in Hebrew for the inspirational "Believe." This set ended with female voices

IF YOU GO ...

What: "C'mon Along and Listen to ...," Oscar-winning songs performed by the Classic Choral Society

Where: United Church of Christ, Route 94 and Old Dominion Road, Blooming Grove

When: 4 p.m. Sept. 14

Admission: Goodwill offering

Call: 928-6462

invoking "It Might as Well Be Spring" (1945), the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic from "State Fair."

The melodic "Moon River" (1961) from "Breakfast at Tiffany's" opened the final set, followed by the witty "Swinging on a Star" (1944) from Bing Crosby's "Going My Way." Of course, "Over the Rainbow" (1939) from "The Wizard of Oz" was a program must, and the chorus sang it with freshness and verve. "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah" (1947) won another Disney prize in "Song of the South" and closed the afternoon on a high nostalgic note. For an encore, "Baby It's Cold Outside" (1949) and "White Christmas" (1942) reminded the audience that summer is ending and winter is on its way.

The concert voices throughout were well enhanced by the accompaniment of Jimrae K. Lenser on digital piano, lead guitarist Rob Helsel, bass guitarist John Yates and drummer Al Konikowski.