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## Concert Review

# Concert a multifaceted look at love

**MUSIC REVIEW:** Voces Novae

**By Marty Rosen**

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Mustering adequate superlatives to describe a Voces Novae concert is no easy task. Since its founding in 1993, the choral ensemble has become one of Louisville's most formidable and satisfying performing arts organizations. Its program yesterday at Church of the Ascension, "Prisms: Love," built on that record of accomplishment with a fascinating, multifaceted look at love in its manifold forms.

The first five selections used texts drawn from the biblical Song of Solomon (three of the pieces highlighted the lines from Chapter 2 that read "Rise up, my love, my fair one"). In concept and execution it was a triumphant cross-cultural exploration of musical approaches that could only have been essayed by an extraordinarily well-prepared chorus, but conductor Frank A. Heller III had his forces in exquisite form.

The intricacies of Palestrina's sixteenth century motet "Osculetur Me," sung a cappella, were couched in perfectly chiseled phrases that flowed with an easy, organic balance. It's nearly inconceivable that a few minutes later the same choir was shaking the rafters with William Billings' jubilant 1778 "I Am The Rose of Sharon" (also sung a cappella), a muscular anthem full of tone-painting wit.

Three selections explored the rose as romantic metaphor. Morten Johannes Lauridsen's "Dirait-On," with text in French from a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, flowed in supple, hypnotic waves. Timothy Snyder's "Go, Lovely Rose" had a stately, methodical grace that duly expressed Edmund Waller's verse. And James Quitman Mulholland's "A Red, Red Rose" was a ravishing take on the Scottish ballad that culminated in a staggering crescendo that plunged into an equally stunning hush.

The afternoon came to a rousing conclusion with three classics from the American vernacular: Robert Shaw and Alice Parker's arrangement of "O Susanna," George Mead's version of "Down In The Valley" and Mack Wilber's take on "Cindy." No guilty pleasures, these; they were full of raucous energy, but clearly had been lavished with the same meticulous respect and attention to choral detail as any other masterwork on the program.