

Evelyn White Chorale

Reprinted from yesterday's late editions

The Evelyn White Chorale, a splendid ensemble made up mostly of stalwarts from Washington's notable black church choirs, appeared Sunday night at the National Gallery of Art.

The most exciting moment came in the Washington premiere of a fairly short work called "Hosanna to the Son of David," by Leslie Adams. The composer is a new name to this listener; his ascending patterns of wide intervals, never suggesting a clear tonic key, recall the heady exuberance of similar passages in Bernstein's "Mass." Also characteristic of "Mass" are Adams' sudden contrasts of strutting athletic leaps with short fragments of melting lyricism. There was that extroverted populist tone that Bernstein sometimes cultivates. And maybe it's eclectic, but has anyone ever suggested that "Mass" isn't?

The piece opened the program's second half, which was labeled "Music by Afro-American Composers." James Furman's "Hehlelooyuh: A Joyous Experience" was especially fun. It is, in effect, a one-word patter song for a cappella choir, based on "Alleluia." And after that were four particularly rich arrangements of spirituals. "Deep River" had some surprising harmonic twists and ended on a ravishing, soft low chord.

The program's first half, with works of the European masters, was harder to judge. The contrapuntal complexities of the opening Bach Motet, "Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied," were substantially lost in the East Garden Court's reverberant acoustics ---- as were the inner voices of the Brahms, Schumann and Mendelssohn that followed.

-Lon Tuck