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## German quintet works its magic at Madeleine Festival

MADELEINE FESTIVAL, Cathedral of the Madeleine  
By Edward Reichel

The Cathedral of the Madeleine opened its 20th anniversary festival Sunday with one of Germany's leading a cappella groups, the Calmus Ensemble. Currently on tour in the United States, the Calmus Ensemble made its Salt Lake City debut at Sunday's Madeleine Festival with a program of German sacred music from the baroque to the 20th century.

This vocal quintet consists of four graduates of Leipzig's famed St. Thomas Choir School (countertenor Sebastian Krause, tenor Tobias Poche, baritone Ludwig Bohme and bass Joe Roesler) together with soprano Anja Lipfert.

The singing that was on display Sunday was nothing short of remarkable. These five young artists achieved the impossible and brought a cappella singing to a higher level. The Calmus Ensemble towers above all other a cappella groups. What distinguishes this quintet is the clarity and precision of its tone, its articulation and perfect intonation. They are technically stunning singers, but equally important, their interpretive talents and musicality are matchless. They infuse their singing with wonderful lyricism and exquisite expressiveness, they bring passion to their interpretations and they, quite simply, bring whatever they sing to glorious life.

The first half of the concert consisted of motets by Heinrich Schutz and chorales by J.S. Bach. Schutz, rightly considered the father of German music, was the most significant German composer before Bach and one of the most important composers of the early baroque. Representing a transitional period in music between the renaissance and the emerging baroque, Schutz's music is a wonderful blend of old style polyphony and newer means of expression.

The pieces by Schutz that the Calmus Ensemble sang were taken from the "Geistliche Chormusik" ("Sacred Choral Music") of 1648, one of Schutz's most important collections of works. The seven pieces that were performed are wonderfully poignant, heartfelt and sincere. They are simple settings of the texts, but rich in expression and touching in their emotional intensity.

The ensemble captured the character of these pieces forcefully. Their interpretations were vibrant, dynamic and compelling — direct, yet with a poignancy that was almost romantic in feeling.

The same held true for the six Bach chorales that they sang, of which the best known today is "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott" ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"). The five singers captured the deep spirituality of these pieces and brought eloquence and sincerity to their interpretations.

The program for the second half brought more stylistic variety to the concert and featured works by Felix Mendelssohn and Max Reger as well as that of two obscure 20th century composers, Kurt Thomas and Hugo Distler. But the eight works on this segment still had a common thread — they all looked to the past for their stylistic elements and musical fabric.

The Calmus Ensemble gave particularly stunning readings of Thomas' evocative "Fuhrwahr, er trug unsere Krankheit" ("Surely He Hath Borne Our Grievs") and "Gott wird abwischen alle Tranen" ("God Shall Wipe Away All Tears"), as well as Distler's jubilant "Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied" ("Sing A New Song To the Lord").

As an encore, the group sang Reger's atmospheric "Nachtlied" ("Evensong").