Choral Society gives spirited concert

By Ed Lamon

In 1730, Bach incorporated into St. John’s Passion all the dramatic devices at his disposal, producing a profoundly expressive, powerfully charged masterpiece. In Rehearsal Auditorium Friday night, Zilk Liljenwallen’s performance succeeded in bringing forth these strong feelings from the music. The basis of all Bach is polyphonic contrapuntal, brought out beautifully in the arias for solo voice, two woodwinds, and continuo. The music in these arias is in some of Bach’s best, charged with emotion, balanced, yet explosive. This feeling was brought out successfully, and it is truly unfortunate that Helen Bostwick’s voice was not as clear as it could be. However, both her interpretations and Danielle Alberts’ were a joy to hear. I was equally impressed with Paul Mathison’s performance, as he also seemed to capture the spirit of the music in his later arias.

Chorus impresses

The performance, specifically the chorus, seemed to improve as it progressed. The opening chorus was sung in a smooth, interesting, masterful style rather than the clear, crisp polyphony required of these choruses. Although the choruses never outgrow their amateurish, strained sound, it did manage to become involved in the spirit of the Passion as the second part started, and this spirit grew as the crowd became more bloodthirsty, culminating in the choral section where the crowd demands Christ’s crucifixion. When the mood of the music changed to a religious rather than a vivid emotional climax, the spirit of the Passion remained, and was even passed off onto the soloists, improving their performance. This later interpretation of the music more than made up for the Choral Society’s poor start.

Blake Storm

Recitative can be repetitious and boring, but a joint effort by Bach and Blake Storm, the tenor Evan-Foster, succeeding in making these passages as interesting, emotional, and musically full as the rest of the passion. When Bach portrayed a feeling of the mood of the music, he wanted the audience not only to feel the emotion, but actually to experience it. The Choral society began just playing the Passion according to St. John, but soon brought out the life of this magnificent piece of music.