



## Lionheart's a capella program is just sublime

By ELAINE SCHMIDT  
Special to the Journal Sentinel  
Posted: April 15, 2007

Perhaps Saturday evening's Lionheart concert at the St. Joseph Center Chapel should have been billed as "60 minutes of serenity."

Presented by Early Music Now, the New York-based male sextet brought the warm, homogeneous sound and the impeccable musicianship and scholarship for which they are well known to an a cappella program of Gregorian chant and Renaissance sacred music by Francisco Guerrero and Cristóbal de Morales. Uninterrupted by intermission or, at the performers' request, by applause, the concert made the realities of time and place slip away.

Titled "*El Siglo de Oro*" ("The Century of Gold"), the program was filled with exquisite music and built of subtle contrasts in style, timbre, tempo and texture, which combined to create a surprising amount of variety.

Near the midpoint of the program, the sextet sang the simple, profoundly important, two-line chant, "*Ecce virgo concipiet*" (English text: "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel"). It was followed by a quartet of members singing Guerrero's "*Pan divino, gracioso*," an effervescent, dance-like celebration of the ordinary.

Dividing again, a trio then presented Guerrero's "*Pastor, quien madre virgen*," with a final contradiction that received a chuckle from those in the audience who were following the translation.

Although the singers create an incredibly seamless blend when singing in full ensemble, hearing the various voices in exposed passages points out how different their voices are from one another.

Careful mixing, matching and balancing of those voices into the smaller quartets and trios heard throughout the evening created a remarkable variety of sounds.

Variety of sounds and a homogeneous blend are only the tip of Lionheart's musical iceberg. These men sing together with impeccable skill and nuance. They attack and release notes and phrases in perfect unison, pausing long enough to let the acoustics of the room do their work.

They shape phrases together as smoothly as a single hand works clay on a potter's wheel, and they place musical accents and consonants within the text with absolute precision.

The men created such an otherworldly sound Saturday evening that their simple black suits presented a delightfully curious anachronism. One almost expected monk's robes.