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Nordic Voices

If an audience member had asked the singers of Nordic Voices to tie their vocal cords in knots or chant in perfect accord while drinking glasses of water, they might have done it. At their Dumbarton Concerts performance Saturday night at Dumbarton United Methodist Church, no feat seemed impossible.

Just in from [Oslo](#), the ensemble presented a combination of Renaissance and contemporary works on sacred texts, notably three settings of "O magnum mysterium." In the most exciting of these, written in 2006 by the Norwegian composer Henrik Odegaard, the group's three women and three men stretched voice and mind to their limits. They explored quarter tones and overtones, let out fierce, tribal-sounding calls, hummed, and saturated the room in glorious, full-voiced sound. At times, they sounded like an engine revving up; at others, like an angelic choir. They transitioned seamlessly from one style to another, and intonation was flawless. Their entrances and cutoffs were perfectly timed, as though a current of air were being switched on and off.

Though fascinating, such pyrotechnics were not the group's sole offering. Throughout the Renaissance works, the singers' tone was pure and rich, like an organ. Counterpoint and expression sounded clear and natural; as solo lines came to the surface and mingled, singers appeared to be lost in their own worlds, with unison endings emerging miraculously.

Such mesmerizing talent is rare. With so many musical offerings at the larger venues in Washington, it is easy to lose sight of how vast the music world is, and how much one may be missing. As Nordic Voices proves, looking past the [Kennedy Center](#) can be well worth the effort.

-- [Ronni Reich](#)