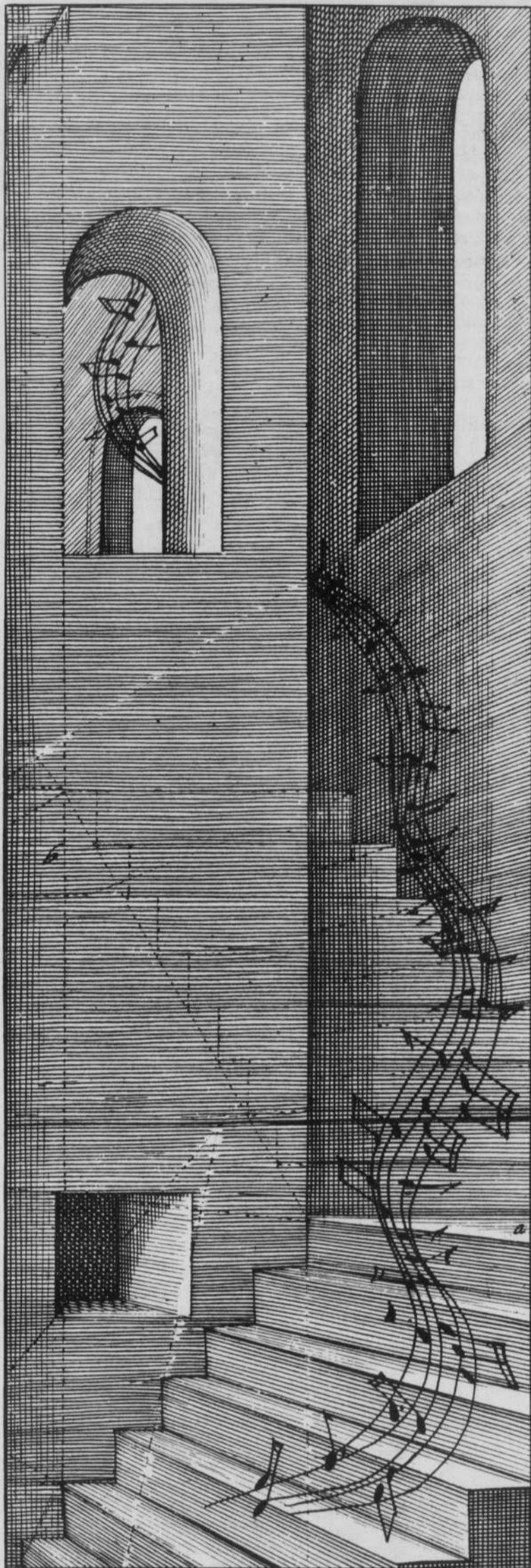


'Oh Magnum Mysterium' embellishes stairwell



Graphic by Sioux Anderson

By JIM GERSBACH
Of the Emerald

The PLC stairwell is ugly. The steps are a cold gray, the dirty walls a sickly cream color.

But Thursday morning something beautiful happened there.

On the first floor landing, four singers from the music school cleared their throats of the stairwell dust and performed "Oh Magnum Mysterium" by the 16th-century composer Tomas Luis de Victoria.

The singers were testing the acoustics in the stairwell that attracts a parade of amateur musicians, whistlers and singers.

Most are drawn, no doubt, by the irresistible silence. Even tone-deaf students can't resist humming in the caverns of Chapman, Condon, Science II or Lawrence.

Being surrounded by your own voice is mesmerizing, and empty stairwells are protectively private. The same anonymity that inspires graffiti artists tempts potentially great tenors to flex their vocal chords.

And cement doesn't snicker. Neither do the tiles in the men's shower room in Esslinger Hall, also an excellent place for singing, says music student Ray Morse.

The room's smooth walls and large size "make you sound good," he says.

But the PLC stairwell doesn't fare as well in comparison. It sounds slightly harsh because it's so closed in, Morse says.

But the reverberation there enhances the music "so it really balances the harshness caused by the relatively small space," he adds.

The result is PLC is "a fun place to sing."

It certainly was for Morse and Julie Vander Schaaf, Sonja Rasmussen and Scott Manton, the four music-school singers.

While fluorescent lights hummed like wasps, the singers' voices reverberated off the smooth walls and shot upward through the nine-story stair shaft. Somewhere above the singers' heads a door squeaked open, sounding like a great Medieval church door.

When the doors shut, they sounded like cannon shots.

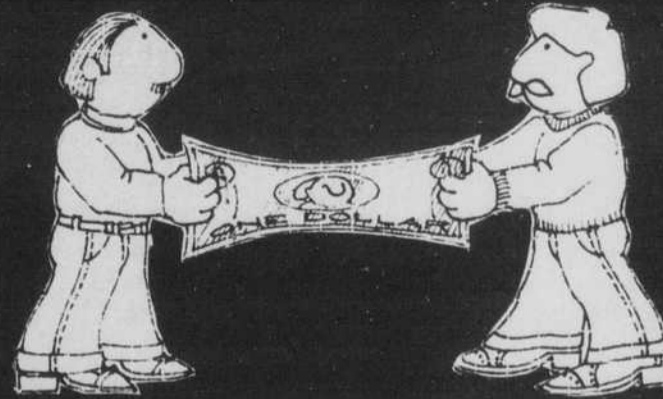
Midway through the impromptu performance, a professor walked in. Momentarily startled to see four faces intently offering up Latin hymns, he instinctively ducked and sneaked past, taking stairs two at a time.

At the top, the wafting voices sounded like a musical wind from a cave. Is this how the voices of choirs sound to God in Heaven?

Vander Schaaf thought not. "It's sort of like singing in the shower."

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