

Yale Russian Chorus gives provocative, stirring program

By RICHARD RILEY

Have you ever had the feeling, upon attending a concert performed by a well-known professional ensemble, that if you scratched away the veneer of technical fluency there would be no music underneath?

Happily, one occasionally experiences the opposite, and Sunday afternoon's concert by the Alumni of the Yale Russian Chorus at First Church, Court Square was just such a concert. Beneath the rough exterior of this amateur group of singing doctors, lawyers, professors, and business men there was stirring, provocative music-making.

Directed by Daniel V. Gsovski, an attorney in New York, the 29-member group sang four sacred works, a couple of soldier's marches, and an astonishingly wide variety of folk and dancing songs.

All 16 selections were sung from memory — in Russian, or Russian dialects, of course — and

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approximately half of the chorus members were featured at one time or another as soloists.

The biggest surprise was not that most of these gentlemen could sing well, but that there was such an individual and specific stylistic identification with each piece. The sacred pieces, particularly "Blazhen Muzh" (Blessed is the Man) by Kiev-Pechersky, were dark and fervently mysterious, the marching songs full of tragic bravado. The folk pieces, which were not necessarily all that simple musically or expressively, showed great emotional range on the part of each soloist and director Gsovski.

The group rehearsed only two hours for the concert. The group exists, you see, to perform in Springfield. The Alumni of the Yale Russian Chorus has never performed anywhere except at First Church, and they only per-

form there once a year.

The public concert (Sunday's was the sixth annual) grew out of a yearly get-together hosted by the late Robert Leland Kenney. The men would get together at his house in Somersville and sing through the songs learned while they were in Russian Chorus at Yale.

The songs "stay in the head" according to Gsovski, which, along with logistical impossibility of getting the membership together for more than a few hours, explains why there is so little rehearsal.

"We get along a lot on enthusiasm," Gsovski remarked modestly after the concert.

Maybe. But I heard something more. Mark your calendars now for the group's concert next November on Veterans Day weekend. It's a concert not to be missed.

Program

The Alumni of the Yale Russian Chorus, Daniel V. Gsovski; Sunday at 3 p.m., First Church at Court Square, Springfield.