

# From the Cantata Singers and Ensemble, a lavish night - The Boston Globe

By **Matthew Guerrieri** Globe Correspondent April 02, 2016

Hope or fear, tradition or change, life or death — the polarities of Friday's concert by the Cantata Singers and Ensemble felt up-to-the-minute and perennial at the same time. Music director David Hoose wove the thematic web around a consoling cynosure: Johannes Brahms' "Ein Deutsches Requiem," the final trumpet sounded on a distinctly human scale. But the program left its big questions intriguingly open.

Hope and fear were literally personified in J. S. Bach's Cantata no. 60, "O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort," the emotions in dialogue in the face of death. Interestingly, the casting made the choice more equivocal than might be expected: As Hope, tenor Eric Christopher Perry had a live-wire quality, assertively interpretive, each phrase nervously mercurial; as Fear, alto Lynn Torgove was vocally grounded, stately, dignified. Bass Dana Whiteside provided a smooth, resonant reminder of salvation, but from the back of the Jordan Hall stage: distant solace. A contingent of the choir delivered the closing chorale ("It is enough") with the impartial eloquence of a Greek chorus.

Hoose surrounded Bach's colloquy with instrumental voluntaries by Anton Webern, early modernism at its most purified and potent. Webern's orchestration of the six-part Ricercar from Bach's "Musical Offering" works on an atomic level, Bach's themes and lines spectrographically separated into motivic isotopes; the playing emphasized the fluorescence and warmth generated by the reaction. Webern's Five Movements for String Orchestra, op. 5b — a still-underperformed classic of concentrated expression — received a superb realization, searing yearnings complementing beautifully cold comforts.

It was a lot of music to set up Brahms' Requiem — hardly an abridged statement itself. The performance, though, made its own resplendent argument. The full chorus took the stage, with lavish sound; from the sizable orchestra, Hoose drew similar bounty. The richness was amplified by the rhythmic conception, replacing almost every possible hard edge with some small dose of expansive grandeur: a sigh of rubato, a choral cushion of extravagant consonants, an accent made to bloom rather than bite. Each attack didn't so much articulate the beat as envelop it.

The soloists floated among and over the discourse: Mark-Andrew Cleveland's baritone ever-elegant and refined, Majie Zeller's soprano a gossamer suspension, both giving scale to the landscape. The rendition didn't quite square the first half's either-or divisions, but the prevailing generosity made a case for, perhaps, encompassing them — Brahms advocating for the possibility of turning each "or" into an "and."

**Cantata Singers and Ensemble**

David Hoose, Music Director and Conductor Music by Bach, Webern, and Brahms At: Jordan Hall, Friday

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