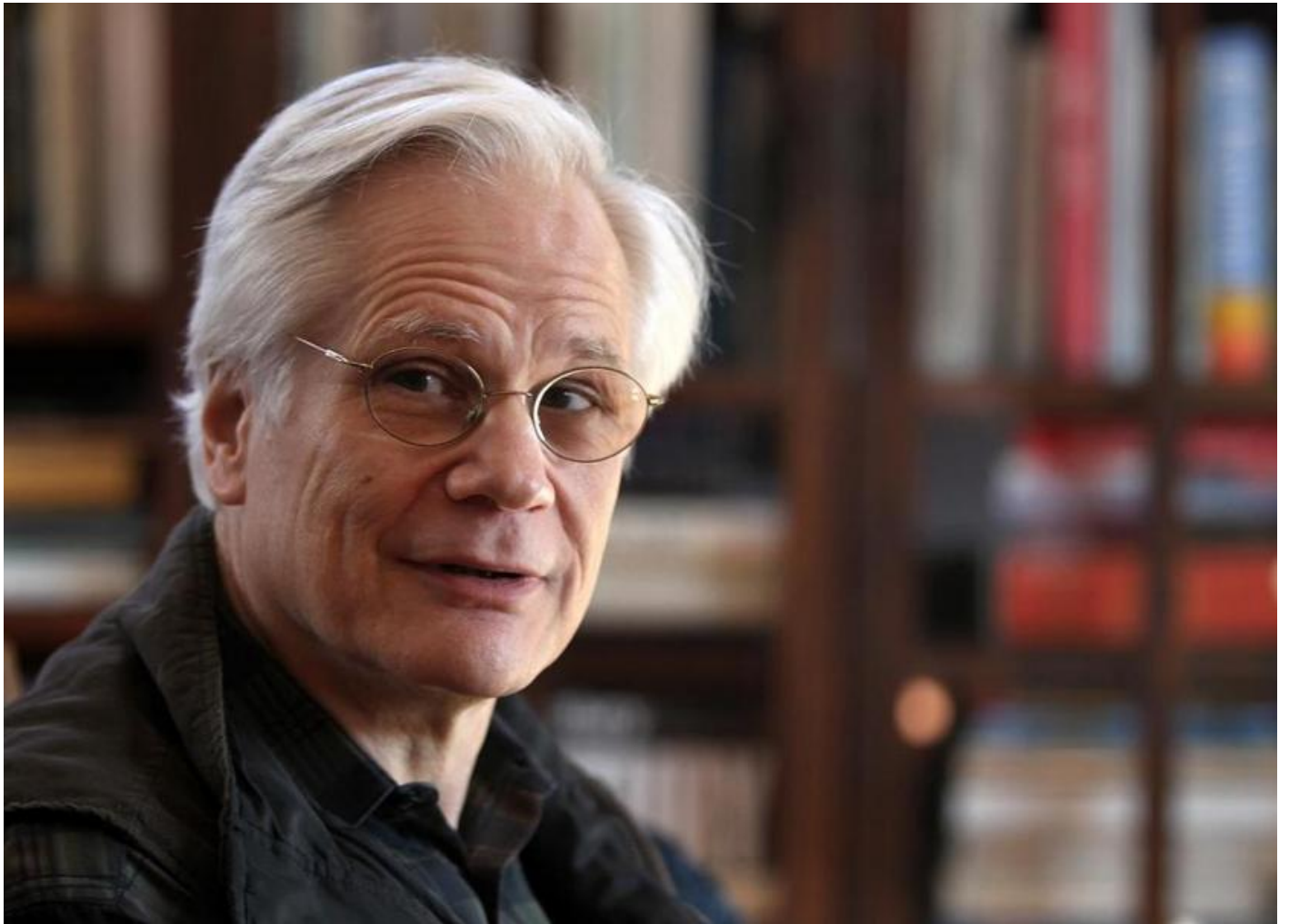


MUSIC REVIEW

In Cantata Singers premiere, ancient lamentation yoked to modern pain



PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

David Hoose is in his 35th season as Cantata Singers music director.

By [Jeremy Eichler](#)

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The Cantata Singers was founded more than half a century ago to explore the music of Bach, and the loyalty of its stalwart audiences is the kind of thing that makes Boston's music scene

unique.

Fortunately, the group's supporters have found a music director whose commitment mirrors their own. Now in his 35th season, David Hoose continues to honor the group's original goals while laboring to avoid any stagnation in its mission. On Saturday night in Jordan Hall, Hoose returned to the podium with a program devoted to Bach — including a Cantata never sung before by this group — and a world premiere commissioned to honor his tenure.

While new music is not a big part of this group's public image, it has remained an institutional priority. The new piece by Peter Child, titled "Lamentations," is actually the 15th score commissioned by Cantata Singers, and it builds on the group's tradition of interest in music with oblique or explicit ties to history, politics, and current events (Donald Sur's "Slavery Documents" and Child's own "Estrella" are both prime examples).

In "Lamentations," Child, a professor of music at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has sought to foreground a contemporary social justice issue — the worldwide refugee crisis and the painfully tenuous fate of many undocumented immigrants here in the United States — while steering clear of the many pitfalls evident in crafting explicitly political music. He has done so by turning to an ancient text with profound present-day resonance, the Book of Lamentations from the Old Testament.

David Rosenberg's free translation, clearly undertaken with 20th-century tragedies in mind, helped Child artfully bridge the gap between the ancient destruction of the First Temple and (without explicit mention) the kinds of wrenching stories in the news daily. The resulting score, for chorus, vocal soloists, strings, piano, and percussion, hits its mark with music by turns insistent, anguished, supplicatory, and, at the end, white-hot. Hoose drew a fully committed performance from the chorus and soloists Jennifer Webb and Will Prapestis, punctuated by fervent, angular interjections from the orchestra. Most notable were the work's highly dissonant concluding verses, delivered on Saturday with unalloyed fury. Beware of false consolation, the ending's message seemed to be. Clearly none was on offer.

Two early Bach Cantatas provided the bookends for Saturday's premiere: BWV 2 and BWV 21. The former is a new addition to the chorus's repertoire, even after 54 seasons. Solo contributions were lucid, and Hoose's way with these works was succinct and humane. The

choral singing, with varying degrees of polish, remained consistently attuned to the music's inner expressive landscapes. These singers' relationship to Bach runs audibly deep. At the same time, indicating the range of the group's curiosity, its next program (on Feb. 2) will be devoted to 20th-century music of South America and Spain.

CANTATA SINGERS

At Jordan Hall, Saturday night

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