

MUSIC REVIEW

A 'Missa Solemnis' from the heart with Cantata Singers



JAMES LUO

David Hoose led the Cantata Singers at Jordan Hall.

By Zoë Madonna

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In the score of his “Missa Solemnis,” Beethoven inscribed, “From the heart — may it return to the heart!” There’s no doubt that the “Missa” is from the heart; it may be one of the rawest musical expressions in the pre-Romantic period. Performances are relatively rare: It can’t

claim the immediate appeal of his Symphony No. 9 or the intimate ingenuity of the final piano sonatas. Also, the work's technical demands are daunting; one needs a large, energetic chorus and a quartet of tireless, limber-voiced soloists, as well as a full orchestra. But all these things were present at Jordan Hall on Friday night as music director David Hoose led Cantata Singers in a blazing, intermissionless rendition of the Herculean work.

The stage was arranged with the soloists at the front of the chorus but behind the orchestra, setting them up as kin to the chorus rather than stars. In the first movement, the "Kyrie," the quartet unfurled an unbroken banner of sound, with tenor Yeghishe Manucharyan's upper register adding a striking gleam. Throughout, soprano Dana Lynne Varga streaked up into the stratosphere and back down to earth with ease, and contralto Emily Marvosh caught the eye with her rapt smile and the ear with her plum-wine voice. Meanwhile Mark Andrew Cleveland's bass voice floated to the front of the soundscape even in its lowest register during the "Agnus Dei." Hoose capably managed the vocal-orchestral balance with emotive gestures, making sure the singers weren't flooded out.

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The terrain of the "Missa" is unpredictable. Dynamics, tempos, and mood turn on a dime. But it was clear the singers knew it quite well, and they tackled it with great gusto, confidence, and skill. The flaring fugues in the "Gloria" were especially excellent, as were the cozy harmonies of the "Sanctus" after the whirlwind "Credo," though diction was smudgy at times.

The orchestra was solid and intelligent, though instrumental entrances were sometimes out of step. Concertmaster Danielle Maddon delivered a serene solo in the “Benedictus.”

It was a performance from the heart, and if the audience’s response was any indication, Beethoven’s directive of “may it return” was fulfilled.

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