

## The Greenwich Citizen:

### Choral Society Dedicates Requiem to Victims of Newtown and Boston

by Linda Phillips

With a soaring performance of Mozart's Requiem in **D minor, K 626**, the Greenwich Choral Society crowned its 89<sup>th</sup> season by honoring two contemporary composers who have reached across time and collaborated with artists long gone. But art knows no time frame or boundaries, and the *Lacrimosa* from the Requiem is still the profound statement of loss and grief that it was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and relevant to this country's recent tragedies.

Conductor Paul F. Mueller, always on a musical odyssey, incorporated a work by contemporary composer and Hunter College Professor Shafer Mahoney **Three Brontë Songs**, based on three poems of Emily Brontë, and selected the contemporary completion of the Requiem by Robert D. Levin, composer and pianist, for performance in its program "Eternal Joy".

Mozart, who did not live to complete the work, said to his wife Constanze that he was composing it for his own funeral, which came too soon: the Requiem, which had been commissioned, was unfinished at his death, and his widow tried first one, then another composer, Süssmayer, to complete it. Leave it to Mr. Mueller to find a stirring modern completion, which the listener strove to identify, and compare.

The concert opened with a different configuration of the chorus, ladies in the top row, and the orchestra was expanded for this performance, which opened with Felix Mendelssohn's **Psalm 43: Richte mich, Gott, Op. 78, No. 2**, a musical motet. A capella male voices opened this celestial work in triple meter, sung without accompaniment, female voices entering for a moving choral performance. It was simply majestic.

**This Shall by Thy Lullaby**, three Brontë Songs, began with a romantic orchestral sliding and keyboard trills. The demonic lullaby itself, with ponderous kettledrums and female voices entering against muted horns and woodwinds, were background for the hectoring clarinet. The child urged to slumber didn't have much of a chance until the bells and kettledrums receded. It ended with voices singing sleep, sleep against the turbulent motion of the sea.

In the second song, **What Use is it to Slumber Here?**, the bell-like soprano voice of soloist Kristen Plumley rang out, underscored by the alto section, a flute singing. The chorus entered, floating above Finzi-like orchestral figures, flutes, piccolos and bell leading to the lyric "promise a brighter morrow", and a sustained major chord close.

The third, **And first an hour of mournful musing**, was searching, the opening statement in cellos and basses, French horn speaking, the chorus an extension of woodwinds, moving on to a driving, surging passage and a lone horn repeating. A violin and piano threnody moved to a glorious major statement, voices and orchestra blending, then a dramatic caesura before a fascinating chord sequence and uplifting close.

Composer Shafer Mahoney was in the audience, and took several bows along with Conductor Mueller.

A massive, enduring masterpiece, Mozart's **Requiem** begins its sixteen sections with the *Introit*, strings, woodwinds and kettledrums sounding, the chorus swelling. Contrapuntal, but unlike Bach

motets, it proceeded to a deceptive cadence, then a caesura, and was beautifully sung by the chorus. The pounding fugue of the *Kyrie Eleison* was moving, and well sung and played, followed by the powerful *Dies Irae*, chorus and orchestra in perfect partnership.

The *Tuba Mirum* began with a trombone passage, echoed exactly by the powerful bass soloist, Damian Savarino, the recitative taken by tenor Dann Coakwell, a handsome voice. Holly Sorensen, a lovely Greenwich mezzo-soprano, sang a solo, and then was joined by soprano Ms. Plumley. The singers' following quartet was operatic and sweet. The soloists returned for the *Recordare*, exalted, after the profound *Rex Tremendae*, which featured marvelous dynamics.

Perhaps the loveliest and most profound choral section was *Confutatis*, whose worried opening went to powerful male voices, then to soaring female section in heavenly chords, back and forth. The *Lacrimosa* was tearful, the *Amen* lovely, with chorus predominating, powerful and moving, with soloists entering at intervals. The *Benedictus* riveted, a consonant orchestral string opening with the soloists in solo passages, and counterpoint. The chorus joined and burst forth into a glorious hosanna. *Agnus Dei*, profoundly moving, again featured deceptive cadence, and the *Dies Irae* was pounding and compelling. The *Lux Aeterna* and *Cum Sanctis* ended the work with power.

The Choral Society was excellent throughout, handling crescendos and decrescendos, modulating, singing fugues, and imparting emotion. With the singers standing in Christ Church's magnificent nave, and the orchestra in the apse, this was a fine performance that echoed those of the grand cathedrals of Europe, and its historic singers and orchestras. Conductor Mueller was given a standing ovation, and he cited the Chorus, orchestra and soloists.

For information about the 90<sup>th</sup> season of The Greenwich Choral Society, go to [www.greenwichoralsociety.org](http://www.greenwichoralsociety.org)