



Missa Solemnis review



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Missa Solemnis performed by Vector Wellington Orchestra and the Orpheus Choir.

Once again, after hearing a work commonly called a masterpiece, I found myself wondering why Beethoven's great Mass in D (or *Missa Solemnis*) is not as well known and well loved as Bach's *B minor Mass* or Mozart's *Requiem*. This performance to a sold-out Wellington Town Hall was a triumph, demonstrating through athletic yet refined playing in all departments Beethoven's detailed response to the words of the Catholic Mass.

Yet after all the drama, excitement and musical variety, the harmonic and structural surprises, there's an aftertaste of emotional detachment. It won't do to say Beethoven's ambiguous religious attitudes are the reason. Coached by music director Mark Dorrell, the Orpheus Choir met the often-fearful demands of the score with fortitude and, given the speeds conductor Marc Taddel called for, accuracy and clarity that verged on the virtuosic.

In contrast to other comparable choral works, the soloists are balanced and of constant importance. Emma Fraser, Bianca Andrew, Cameron Barclay and Kieran Rayner blossomed from the start: diction clear and projection strong. Fraser's voice rode the big orchestral and choral forces with thrilling impact, a little later Andrew's voice emerged in its warm beauty.

Underpinning it all was the Vector Wellington Orchestra with Thomas Gaynor at the organ and Matthew Ross playing the lovely violin obbligato in the *Agnus Dei*. The ways in which Beethoven understated each verse of the text, the sharp switches in dynamics and speed and the telling moves between quadruple and triple time were vivid in every part of the work. Unexpected turns such as the hanging conclusion of the *Gloria*, the powerful rendering of the double fugue at "Et vitam venturi saeculi" in the Credo and the contrasts between staccato military fanfares and mysterious calm that led to the enigmatic end of the *Agnus Dei* all testified to a thorough command of the notes and Taddel's grasp of every detail of Beethoven's remarkable score.

A seven-minute overture to the Beethoven was John Psathas's "Century Fanfare", *luminous*: an arresting, cumulative "glowing cloud of sonorities", as the programme described it.



Vector Wellington Orchestra