

**Canton Symphony:  
Mozart *Requiem* (Mar. 23)**

by Kevin McLaughlin



As a whole, Mozart's *Requiem* is a grandiose work, sublime in its evocation of salvation and eternal rest, and fearsome in its visions of the Last Judgment. The grand forces that meet the eye — four soloists, chorus, and orchestra — suggest drama and spectacle, even if the scoring is dark: the lighter hues of flutes and oboes are omitted in favor of basset horns (cousins of the clarinet), bassoons, a choir of trombones, and strings in their lower registers. Even trumpets and timpani are used less for their ceremonial qualities than as emulsifiers of the texture.

In their performance on Saturday, March 23 in Umstattd Hall, conductor Stefan Sanders and the Canton Symphony Orchestra and Chorus presented a version that was more contemplative than awesome, and, despite some stand-out individual contributions, a bit restrained.

Sanders maintained a good balance between human and instrumental voices, though he showed a greater sense of connection with the latter. His stick technique and body language emphasized clarity of beat and rhythmic delineation moreso than any overarching interpretation.

The chorus, though generally well prepared by Douglas Beery, sang as if holding back much of the time, either out of natural reserve or in conformity to the contemplative approach. A nice contrast emerged between the angelic serenity of the sopranos and the vigor of the male voices in the *Confutatis* and again in the *Lacrimosa*, where a sweetness enwreathed the choir like a halo. Tutti entrances were generally successful — the first startling “Rex” in *Rex tremendae*, for example — but contrapuntal passages were sometimes muddy. And there were some mixed signals at the conclusion of the *Benedictus*, when only half of the choir stood up for their entrance.

The *Tuba mirum* put an agreeable spotlight on tenor trombonist Andrew Mitchell for the famous solo. The trombone choir as a whole acquitted themselves well — they found the sweet spot in their twin roles as choral support and soloists.



The vocal soloists, disadvantageously positioned behind the orchestra, still projected well. Amanda Powell sang with a pure and beatific soprano — her effortless upper register soared above the orchestra in several moments of glory. Mezzo Kira

McGirr displayed a rich middle register, which she infused with sympathetic melancholy. John Pickle’s tenor was luminous and expressive, and Edward Vogel’s avuncular baritone was full, warm, and resonant.

The concert began with George Walker’s 1946 *Lyric for Strings*, written in memory of the composer’s grandmother. If not quite achieving the level of despair found in Samuel Barber’s *Adagio for Strings* (an unfair but frequent comparison), Sanders and the Canton strings rendered a heartfelt interpretation, reaching emotional heights in both climaxes before resolving peacefully.

Mozart’s *Symphony in D*, K. 320 (after the Posthorn Serenade) was a nice inclusion just before the intermission. Although this three-movement version is less familiar than the longer, more elaborate Serenade — there’s no cheeky posthorn solo or charming dance movements — it does make for a handsome symphony. The Canton strings and winds

gave lots of sizzle to the outer movements — boisterous music not entirely shed of its dancing clothes — and achieved soft sublimity in the minor-keyed Andante.

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