

Obscure and the familiar from *Gloriae Dei*

By Keith Powers  
Contributing writer

With explorations showing their sense of devotion, and their sense of adventure, the singers of *Gloriae Dei Cantores* presented a program of the familiar — and the not-so-familiar — Saturday evening at the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans.

Mozart's "Requiem"? You know about that. But Benjamin Britten's "The Company of Heaven"? There probably weren't a half-dozen members of the sold-out audience that had ever even heard of the English composer's 1937 cantata (if that's what you call it).

Prepared expertly by director Richard K. Pugsley, the chorus and orchestra were joined by four well-blended soloists to perform Mozart's final work. Martha Guth (soprano), Kathryn Leemhuis (mezzo), Aaron Sheehan (tenor) and Andrew Nolen (bass) sang perfectly well in brief solo moments, but it was their naturally sounding blend with instrumentalists and chorus that added balance to the performance.

The "Requiem" did have an unbalanced beginning, however. The inviting double fugue of the "Kyrie" washed over the room without distinct sounding parts, and overwhelmed the instruments. It does take some time to adjust to the acoustics in the vast church, which is an incredible building, and has many good musical qualities, but is long and tall, causing a pronounced delay echo.

Pugsley pushed his forces urgently through the "Dies Irae"; the four soloists came to life with individual lines in the aptly titled "Tuba mirum" ("wondrous sound"), kicked off by a charged



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duet between Nolen and tenor trombonist Joe Walsh. Circling through well-articulated solos in each range, the foursome culminated with a beautifully woven quartet at "cum vix justus sit securus" ("when the just are mercy needing").

The "Requiem" is a compelling work, proportionate and thoughtful. By the time the music of the double fugue from the "Kyrie" recycles at the conclusion, "Cum sanctis" of the Communion, a deep sense of rest and completion has been achieved.

Describing Britten's "The Company of Heaven" still fails to make sense of it. Set for string orchestra, timpani (alertly played in a major role by Timur Rubinshteyn), and organ, with chorus, tenor and soprano soloists, and three narrators, "The Company of Heaven" alternates between spoken parts and accompanied vocal settings.

Some texts are Old Testament, but most are drawn from British writers: Ruskin, Emily Brontë, Blake, Hopkins and the Rossetts. The subject matter: angels.

The work was written for radio performance, and Britten's music was meant to be incidental accompaniment to the poetry. Therein lies the reason it's not performed — the balance between spoken word and music weighs heavily on the side of the speakers.

The instrumental music, when it does appear, is archly Britten and brilliantly conceived. It mainly centers around the strings, who have a number of idiosyncratic lines and approaches.

But the chorus — the real star of this entire performance — also unleashes its musicianly power with an eight-part a cappella canon, "Whoso dwelleth" from Psalm 91, sung with majesty and precision.

The vocal soloists' parts are limited but touching. Of particular note was Guth simply singing "Hail, Mary" above a single organ note and a scant choir accompaniment, with a calm and lustrous tone.

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## BEST BETS

**FRIDAY, JAN. 22 AND  
SATURDAY, JAN. 23**

### Gloriae Dei Cantores brings Italy tour home

Just back from a tour in Florence, Italy, the Gloriae Dei Cantores choir will present its tour repertoire in two concerts featuring sacred choral music. The program choices will span the globe from Latin America to Estonia, and highlight works by Johann Sebastian Bach, Arvo Pärt, Pablo Casals and others. Ticket-holders are invited to come early for a pre-concert lecture. A reception will follow each concert.

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday (pre-concert lecture: 6:45 p.m.)

**Where:** Church of the Transfiguration, 5 Bay View Drive, Rock Harbor, Orleans

**Tickets:** \$35; \$30 for seniors; free for students and ages 18 and younger

**Reservations:** [www.gdcchoir.org](http://www.gdcchoir.org) or 508-240-2400

**SATURDAY, JAN. 23**

### Sup and celebrate Scottish poet Robert Burns

The Highland Light Scottish Society



Chandler Travis will bring the Philharmonette, a slightly smaller version of his Philharmonic band, Saturday to the Cultural Center of Cape Cod, 307 Old Main St., South Yarmouth for an adults-only night of music and dancing. The cafe-style party will take place from 8 to 10:30 p.m., and attendees are invited to bring their own refreshments (coolers welcome). Admission: \$15; members: \$12. Information: [www.cultural-center.org](http://www.cultural-center.org). CLIFF SPENCER

Leavenworth will lead a hands-on baking group at the Caleb Nickerson House, preparing 18th- and 19th-century recipes in



An interactive mind-reading performance by Jon Stetson, a consultant for the TV show "The Mentalist," at 7 p.m. Saturday will kick off the 2016 dinner theater season at The Cape Codder Resort & Spa, 1225 Iyannough Road, Hyannis. Tickets for the buffet dinner with premium seating are \$59.95; a limited number of show-only tickets will be available.





Entertainment & Life

## **Symphony's 'Ninth' program moving and insightful**

**By Keith Powers / Contributing writer**

Posted May 9, 2016 at 12:49 PM

The Cape Symphony closed its season Sunday afternoon with a historical presentation about Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, followed by a moving performance.

Classical music deals in superlatives. Dozens of musicians might compete for a single onstage chair in a professional orchestra. Conductors spend their lives mastering the repertory, many not reaching their peak until their 60s or 70s. Every performance involves expert artists doing what they have trained all their lives to accomplish.

The repertory – with most works still being explored, ripe for renewed interpretation, and enjoyed centuries after they are written – stands out for its distinguished, and daunting, history.

From all of this, if there is one work to consider as the greatest ever written (why argue about it, really?), it would be Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

The Cape Symphony – conducted by music director Jung-Ho Pak, joined by four soloists and the estimable Gloriam Dei Cantores choir – closed its season Sunday afternoon with a historical presentation about the Ninth, followed by a moving performance. The presentation was a blend of astute documentary and heartfelt musical attention.

The sheer length of the Ninth – much longer than an hour – makes it a programming challenge. Rather than coupling it uncomfortably with another work, Pak chose to give an overview of the gestation of the Ninth, and a look at the era (nearly 200 years ago) when a totally deaf composer could write a vast and complex symphony that would inspire more than any subsequent piece of music.

Pak's thoughts zeroed in on the more than two decades it took Beethoven to complete the score and, using musical examples, the unique qualities of its four movements. Unlike most pre-performance discussions, which either condescend with obvious observations or confound with irrelevant musicological complexities, Pak knows how to focus on the music he loves.

Soprano Sophia Burgos, mezzo Krista River, tenor Charles Blandy and bass David Kravitz joined the choir for the monumental vocal part – monumental as measured by its emotional impact, not its length or difficulty. In fact, the vocalists wait patiently through three movements before even being engaged, a fact that builds the inspirational tension almost unbearably.

The first three movements are balanced in scope, but divergent in mood. The opening phrases of the Ninth take listeners from a pre-cosmic haze – the orchestra sounds like it's still tuning up – to a unified blast of trumpets, in just a minute's time. In a way, Beethoven's goal has already been stated: Everything is possible.

The opening movement was marred by some hesitant phrasing, articulations that did not quite make it clear that one section was done with an idea, and was passing it on to the next.

But the second movement Scherzo was a thing of cohesive brilliance. The slow movement, shifting to a more welcoming key, offers two themes full of possibilities, and Beethoven makes the most of them, eventually weaving them both into a dense contrapuntal texture. The section playing was crisp, especially as the first theme moved through the violas and second violins into the body of the orchestra.

The finale is a symphony unto itself. Before even getting to the Ode to Joy, Schiller's poem aspiring toward human togetherness, the orchestra revisits each of the preceding three movements with a thematic synopsis.

Deep in the lowest strings – the cellos and basses played beautifully here – hesitant remembrances of the earlier ideas are assayed and rejected. Beethoven investigates his own earlier musical notions as a way of forging a conclusion, and finds them imperfect.

Finally Kravitz stands and proclaims in a profound bass, 'Not these notes' – the first words we hear – as a preface to the deeply optimistic lyrics that follow.

Kravitz and Blandy had brief solo sections, both sung with deep confidence and ringing volume. The true beauty for the soloists comes in the quartet blendings that Beethoven provides. The Gloriam Dei Cantores choir's enthusiasm and unified sound cannot be overlooked in making this a memorable performance.

In his best moments – and he has many – Pak conducts both as an orchestra leader and a communicator to the audience. These simultaneous gifts are hard to come by.