

SYMPHONY REVIEW

[Marin Symphony](#) / [Sunday, January 31, 2010](#)

Alasdair Neale, conductor

Vadim Gluzman, violin

Helene Zindarsian, soprano

Anna Jablonski, mezzo soprano

Corey Head, tenor

Jeffrey Fields, baritone

Marin Symphony Chorus



Vadim Gluzman, violin

MARIN FORCES TACKLE MOZART REQUIEM AND BRAHMS VIOLIN CONCERTO

by [Kenn Gartner](#)

Tuesday, February 02, 2010

Upon entering the Marin Civic Center Auditorium Feb. 2 the reviewer was greeted by the spectacle of the chorus warming up on stage. Did Frank Lloyd Wright not provide a choral room? The distinguishing characteristic of this warm up was that not one singer managed to hit the high notes despite the sincere athletic gesticulations of the choral conductor. This was regrettable, for the sopranos often pushed for the A♯s and occasional B flats in an exceedingly ugly fashion. As a voice matures, it darkens, and what could be done earlier in life becomes difficult with age. The vocalise being used, though probably of value for individual singers, is not as good a warm up as are exercises actually designed for a chorus. It certainly did not do its job: throughout the Mozart Requiem, K. 626, whenever the soprano section approached these high pitches, there was a push, an additional ♯h, an oomph of a sort which lent unfortunate percussive

qualities to the vocal line. The fact that pitch has risen steadily since Mozart's time does not help. Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* would be difficult for this chorus.

This preview of things to come permitted us to hear the rather dead space of this auditorium: remarkable architecture, lousy acoustics. The Marin Symphony's brilliance, and it was often brilliant during this performance, was swallowed by the deadening quality of the space.

A near full house heard this second performance of the set of two of Mozart's ultimate work, and regrettably there was a dearth of persons younger than 50. Perhaps one or two per cent, but probably, as Tuesday is a school night, the young were doing homework.

Alasdair Neale, conductor of the Marin Symphony, really knows his stuff. Some weeks ago, I reviewed an oratorio where the conductor avoided looking at the orchestra for the first half of the program. In this concert, Mr. Neale vainly cued and directed the choral ensemble, but with little effect or result. Possibly the chorus set up, combined with the Marin Center's acoustics, had something to do with the quality of the performance. The chorus was lined up, from stage right: soprano, alto, tenor and bass. While this somewhat archaic layout is perfect for this work (allowing the chorus to follow the compositional line quite accurately) it is not helpful to the choral music performance. Musicians generally agree the bass line is the most important line, particularly in regard to the harmonic structure of a work and so chorus members find it easier to remain in tune when they can hear the bass part while singing their own. In this instance, the basses were far from the sopranos who could have used the bass support. There were some strange articulations emanating from the chorus, and for example, the top notes of the scale passages in the Osanna section of *Sanctus* were accented and therefore bordered on the unmusical. These scales start with an agogic accent! Additional accents are both superfluous and examples of poor musicianship. Time would have been better spent fixing the ragged entrances and observing the rests in the *Lacrimosa*.

Program annotator Jon Kochavi gave an excellent précis, including information with which I was unfamiliar, including that the use of trombones was consistent in operatic works with descents into Hell. The trombone makes its official entrance into the symphony orchestra in the fourth movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. So, if Mr. Kochavi's writings are accurate, considering the huge part that the three trombones have in the Requiem, might Mozart have assumed his customer's wife, or Mozart himself, was destined for the lower reaches? It gives one pause.

Soprano Helene Zindarsian was slightly under pitch on her opening note and perhaps she was nervous or under the weather, as this occurred at other times. Tenor Corey Head and baritone Jeffrey Fields did nicely, again considering the lack of good acoustics. However,

mezzo Anna Jablonski's voice and technique shone like limelight throughout the entire house. Her voice seemed made for these environs: clear, defined, magical. Brava! The Symphony administration ran out of programs, distributing some dozens of quickly copied programettes. Thus, I was unable to cite some outstanding orchestra members deserving praise. Suffice to say, the alto trombonist should have taken a bow!

The structure and size of Brahms's Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 77, make it a veritable symphony for the violin, and its complexities are that similar. Israeli violinist Vadim Gluzman did an outstanding job with this monster. Although his tempi may have been more attenuated than Stern or Menuhin, he played with conviction and carried his audience to a true standing ovation! Again, the hall's poor acoustic environment prevented us from hearing the results of some magnificent violin technique. I would have loved to have heard the results of Mr. Gluzman's extraordinary *sautille* and *martellato*. I saw a lot of action but heard little sound.

I am not a great fan of the standing ovation or what seems to be the majority of a modern audience's understanding of a standing ovation. For starters, a standing ovation is one in which a performance is so exciting that at the instant the work is finished, one jumps to his feet in excitement! It is not a slow creeping schlepping, standing up, taking several seconds, not starting to rise until a bit of time has elapsed since the last notes died away. And (this may come as a shock to some) not every performance deserves a standing ovation.

The program concluded with an encore by Mr. Gluzman and the Orchestra: an arrangement of a waltz from Gluck's *Orphée* and *Eurydice*. It was a superb study in *piano*, *pianissimo*, *piano-pianissimo* and *pianissimo-pianissimo*!