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REVIEW**Marin season ends with vigorous Ninth**- [Joshua Kosman, Chronicle Music Critic](#)

Wednesday, May 3, 2006

The Marin Symphony is more than just an orchestra. It also boasts a very handsome chorus, and Sunday night at the Marin Veterans Memorial Auditorium in San Rafael, the group made the most of its yearly outing.

To conclude the season, music director Alasdair Neale led a full-strength, matter-of-fact performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, one that was longer on external vigor than on precision of detail. And for the short first half, he offered music both ceremonial and celebratory by Handel and Vaughan Williams.

The result was a full helping of choral singing, and the Marin Symphony Chorus, led by director Stephen McKersie, took to its assignment with alacrity. Textures were robust and well-balanced, and if a few exposed passages sounded unsteady, the general shape of things was sound.

"Zadok the Priest," the first of Handel's "Coronation Anthems," found the chorus at its lusty best, proclaiming the splendors of the monarchy with plenty of gusto and clarity of diction.

That was followed, rather less persuasively, by "Serenade to Music," Vaughan Williams' lush, hyperglycemic setting of part of the last act of "The Merchant of Venice." This is Vaughan Williams at his most doggedly respectable, cozying up to the listener in a way that his more interesting and acerbic scores never do.

The text, with its extended paean to music, is distributed here and there among the chorus and four vocal soloists, but it is the orchestra -- with a heavy emphasis on harp and strings -- that seeks to re-create the hushed splendor of Shakespeare's moonlit scene.

Neale led the performance with obvious commitment, and there were rapturous solo turns by concertmaster Jeremy Constant. But the long stream of marzipan left a listener eager for something more bracing.

That came after intermission, with Beethoven's explosive masterpiece. Neale took an intriguingly plain-spoken view of the first movement, building things logically rather than opting for shimmering mysticism. For more tender rhetoric, there was the slow movement, done with a sumptuous blend of rhythmic flexibility and lyrical phrasing.

Once again, the chorus rose engagingly to its task in the finale. The vocal soloists for both the Beethoven and the Vaughan Williams, who sang capably without ever standing out, were soprano Jane Jennings, mezzo-soprano Sonia Gariaeff, tenor Thomas Glenn and bass Matthew Treviño.

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