

# HUNTINGTON BEACH INDEPENDENT

April 20, 2006

SOUL FOOD

## Catholic chorale is best in the aria

MICHÈLE MARR

A visionary group of artists has made its home in Huntington Beach. Tomorrow night, the Orange County Catholic Chorale will present "An Evening with Mozart" at the Huntington Beach Central Library Theater.

Brian Dehn, founder, artistic director and conductor of the chorale, told me to expect "a relatively light evening [of] melodies that everyone can enjoy," with music selected by the concert's soloists. Nothing, he said, that's "too stuffy."

As a tenor vocalist, Dehn will present an aria from "Cosi Fan Tutti." Sopranos Risa Larson and Chelsea Dehn, tenor Ernest Alvarez and bass Steven Pence will showcase several other of Mozart's most famous arias. Larson and Chelsea Dehn will perform "Queen of the Night" from "The Magic Flute" and "Voi Che Sapetae" from "The Marriage of Figaro," arias considered among Mozart's most difficult compositions for voice.

Pianist Barbara Worsley, whom Brian Dehn describes as "an orchestra unto herself," will accompany the soloists. She will also treat the audience to "Mozart in the Movies," a retrospective of her own arrangements of familiar melodies heard in the soundtracks of movies as diverse as "X-Men 2," "JFK," "Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle," "Out of Africa," "When Harry Met Sally," and -- of course -- "Amadeus."

Before the 8 p.m. performance, the chorale will host its first silent-auction fundraiser. Proceeds from the auction will allow it to hire the orchestra needed for its June presentation of Mozart's "Grand Mass in C Minor," which demands a larger ensemble -- 40 pieces -- than most of Mozart's sacred masterworks.

In an attempt to raise funds that could equal a healthy down-payment on a luxury car, the auction will feature an array of goods. Bidders will compete for box seats at Dodgers and Angels games, an original Thomas Kinkade painting, complete fishing gear, antique art, jewelry and lavish gift baskets. The auction, held downstairs from the theater in the library's meeting rooms, will begin at 6:30 p.m. Tickets for the tandem events -- a donation of \$15 is suggested -- will be available at the door.

Since a well-received performance of Mozart's "Requiem in D Minor, K. 626" in 2003, the chorale's singers have wanted to take on the challenge of more of his music. The "Grand Mass in C Minor," conductor Dehn said, "is a monumental undertaking" for the group.

For them and for their audience, it's meant to celebrate the Austrian composer's 250th birthday. "We decided," said Dehn, who considers it the grandest piece of music Mozart wrote, "to give him a large, large party."

As with his "Requiem in D Minor," though, Mozart never completed the Mass he began to compose in 1782. No one knows why. Dehn speculates it was simply because he never got around to it.

The "Grand Mass in C Minor" that the chorale will perform at St. John the Baptist Church in Costa Mesa is a version by musicologist and Mozart scholar Robert D. Levin, who in 2004 used the composer's surviving rough drafts from 1783 to complete the sacred music. Levin, who had long dreamed of doing so, uncovered the manuscripts in library collections in Austria, Germany and Poland.

Working from Mozart's notes, Levin added instrumentation and reconstructed sections of the Mass to make it liturgically complete. First performed at Carnegie Hall in January 2005, Levin's version of the "Grand Mass in C Minor" is 30 minutes longer than the more familiar version. In spite of its length, Brian Dehn says it "goes by so fast you want more."

He considers some of its new movements to be "every bit as magical as the ones composed by Mozart himself." For example, he said, its "Agnus Dei," is now one of his favorites movements from any of Mozart's works. He calls the Mass an "intriguing work that clearly illustrates the breadth and depth of Mozart's genius."

The chorale's June performance of Levin's "Grand Mass in C Minor" will be the first in Southern California. The ensemble will travel to Prague in July to perform the Mass with the Czech National Symphony in Smetana Hall under the direction of Brian Dehn.

Dehn had conducted choirs at the Sistine Chapel and St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, St. Matthias Church in Budapest, St. Thomaskirche in Vienna, the Berlin Cathedral, and the Benedetto Marcello Conservatory in Florence before founding the Orange County Catholic Chorale in 2002 as an extension of his choir at Saints Simon and Jude Catholic Church in Huntington Beach.

Two years ago, the chorale separated from the church and became a community choir, welcoming all interested singers who successfully audition. Since then, it has performed Berlioz's "Requiem" for the William Hall Choral Festival at the Sidney Opera House in Australia, and it was the first guest choir to perform at Sidney's St. Mary's Cathedral after the conclusion of its centennial renovation.

Each July, the chorale still presents its local, widely attended Patriotic Concert, which features popular classics such as "God Bless America," "When the Saints Go Marching In," "the Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "The Battle of Jericho."

Dehn says the Orange County Catholic Chorale is ready to take on new challenges as a major community music ensemble. It will continue to promote the appreciation and knowledge of choral music with its Patriotic Concert and events such as tomorrow night's "An Evening with Mozart."

It will also preserve the traditions of sacred music through the performance of masterworks such as Mozart's "Requiem in D Minor, K. 626," M. Lauridsen's "Lux Aeterna" and Ralph Vaughan Williams' "Dona Nobis Pacem." But it will also embrace the added goal of encouraging the creation of choral works by performing music such as Levin's completed "Grand Mass in C Minor" and, very soon, hopes Brian Dehn, by sponsoring a competition offering a monetary award for compositions he envisions to be "new and exciting."

You can keep an eye on the calendar and accomplishments of the chorale by visiting its web site, [www.ocatholicchorale.org](http://www.ocatholicchorale.org).

Huntington Beach is fortunate to have this farsighted musical ensemble make its home here.

*\* MICHELE MARR is a freelance writer from Huntington Beach. She can be reached at [michele@soulfoodfiles.com](mailto:michele@soulfoodfiles.com).*