

Douglas goes solo in Beethoven's No. 3

By [Michael Huebner -- The Birmingham News](#)

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Barry Douglas



ALABAMA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Justin Brown, conductor
Barry Douglas, pianist
Birmingham Concert Chorale
Jennifer Alymer, soprano; Aidan Soder, mezzo-soprano; Chad Johnson, tenor; Eric Owens, bass

Friday, Alys Stephens Center
Repeats today at 8 p.m.

After more than three weeks flirting with the moderns, the **Alabama Symphony** stepped back two centuries to the heart of the classical repertoire. Beethoven's middle piano concerto -- No. 3 in C minor -- stands at the juncture of classicism and romanticism, and soloist Barry Douglas took full advantage in his free-wheeling interpretation, imbibing in a swinging pendulum of tempos and a heavy foot on the sustain pedal.

The virtuoso from Northern Ireland, who recently recorded this work with his own orchestra, **Camerata Ireland**, while conducting from the keyboard, had no trouble adjusting to the soloist role, often challenging conductor Justin Brown to stay with his tempo shifts. Brown has a sixth sense for such matters, so keeping soloist and orchestra on the same page was not a problem.

The Largo movement gave Douglas license to exhibit considerable grace, poetry and a lyrical touch before embarking on a swashbuckling, highly animated Rondo. The ASO responded by creating an instant rapport, riding the ups and downs of Beethoven -- via Douglas' flamboyant flips and growling arpeggios -- with assuredness.

With 150 from **Birmingham Concert Chorale** crowded on the Jemison Concert Hall stage, Mozart's "Requiem" was nothing if not loud. Brown acted as the musical GPS, conveying his well-calculated musical vision by herding orchestra, chorus and four soloists into a cohesive whole. Choral phrasings in the fast-paced Kyrie were attention-grabbing staccatos. "Rex Tremendae" was deafening, yet the Philip Copeland-trained choir could sing with focused lyricism and respond instantly to dynamic shifts. Too often, however, the sopranos swelled to ear-splitting volume when the music simply called for focused power.

The vocalists formed a well-match blend, the gentle "Benedictus" reaching the high point of the Requiem's lyrical moments. Solos by bass Eric Owens in "Tuba Mirum" and soprano Jennifer Aylmer in "Lux aeterna" were the standouts.

Underlying the mass of voices, the ASO accompanied with just the right balance, the pair of clarinetists and trio of trombones turning in solid, yet understated performances.