

CONCERT REVIEW

'Requiem' by Verdi powerful, with plenty of voices, orchestra

By **MICHAEL HUEBNER**
News staff writer

More than 300 charged-up musicians left the rafters vibrating Friday night at the Alys Stephens Center.

For 85 minutes, a sold-out audience was transfixed on Verdi's "Requiem." Rarely could a cough or a whisper be heard, so captivating were the caressing sweetness of "Requiem aeternam, dona eis" and numbing power of "Dies irae." Justin Brown masterminded the proceedings. The Alabama Symphony, four world-class vocal soloists and six combined choirs carried them out.

To say it was loud inside Jemison Concert Hall would be an understatement. With 20 extra symphony musicians, a Wagnerian mezzo-soprano and a soprano and bass that easily cut through 250 choristers at full-throated volume, there was no shortage of decibels.

But there were also tender moments that could melt your heart. The "Hostias" comes to mind for the gentle reverence instilled by the quartet of soloists, soprano Marina Shaguch contributing angelic radiance above a shimmering string accompaniment.

Each soloist brought unique qualities, yet they created a silky blend when singing together. Shaguch could focus to a lovely pianissimo, then swell to a controlled, penetrating volume. Mezzo-soprano Margaret Jane Wray sang with passion and character, bass Eric Owens with robust authority. Tenor Vinson Cole's voice could be just as

★★★★☆

ALABAMA SYMPHONY VERDI: "REQUIEM"

Justin Brown, music director
Marina Shaguch, soprano
Margaret Jane Wray, mezzo-soprano
Vinson Cole, tenor
Eric Owens, bass

Choirs from Birmingham-Southern College, Samford University, University of Alabama at Birmingham, University of Alabama and University of Montevallo
Friday

Alys Stephens Center
Repeats today at 8 p.m.

hearty, but his was a more introspective, reverent and songful expression. His gentle "Ingemisco" was a highlight of the performance. Wray and Cole were 11th-hour replacements, making their fine showing all the more remarkable.

As impressive as the chorus was in the repeated strains of the "Dies irae," its sheer size occasionally worked against it. It was apparent from the start that maneuvering a body of singers this large would be like moving a mountain. With 100 less, it might have brought more definition to the "Sanctus" and "Libera me" and still had enough power to belt out the "Dies irae."

With singers from five area college choirs plus the Birmingham Concert Chorale, this was a community-galvanizing event, and a feather in the ASO's cap. Musically, it was inspiring as well, if a bit weighty.

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