

## MUSIC REVIEW

**Musica Sacra breathes freshness, fire into Requiem**

By Richard Buell, Globe Correspondent, 10/30/2002

How was it that the Mozart Requiem came up sounding uncommonly fresh and direct - almost like breaking news - on Saturday night? The success of Milos Forman's "Amadeus" turned the Requiem into one of the handful of Mozart pieces that "everybody" knows; and post-9/11 it's been even more so. That's sure evidence of the music's ability to console and exalt, of course, but what a stiff challenge to conductors wary of its turning into something glazed-over, faceless, and institutional.

Mary Beekman, now in her 24th season as conductor of Musica Sacra, has always favored a lean, transparent, quick-speaking choral sound, distinctly on the vibrato-shy side of things.

That was part of the story, and so was Beekman's interpretive "style without a style." A characteristic lift to the phrasing (no clunky downbeats, no italicized underlinings) made this 30-member chorus a perfect collegial match to the Orchestra of Emmanuel Music, whose crack players obviously liked what they heard. What might not have been predicted from this assemblage of virtues was how fiery it could be.

Fiery but sane. Ratcheted up a few more degrees, the eager, contrapuntal singing might have turned into a gabble. But this never happened. A nicely stocked vocal quartet (Janet Brown, soprano; Mary Westbrook-Geha, mezzo; Mark Kagan, tenor; Mark Andrew Cleveland, bass) militated against stolidity, as did Beekman's gently urgent sense of pace. Mozart Requiems, which come large and small, withdrawn and histrionic, starry and otherwise, don't always generate the kind of subliminal momentum this one did.

**Musica Sacra**

At: First Church Congregational, Cambridge, Saturday night

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