

ShortTakes: Page turns to retirement after stylish last concert

Tuesday, April 12, 2005

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Mendelssohn Choir

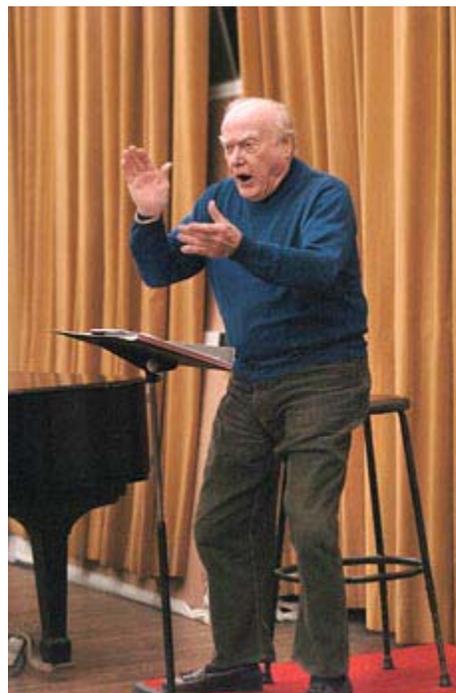
In his last official act as music director and conductor of Pittsburgh's Mendelssohn Choir, Robert Page went out in grand style Sunday at the ensemble's concert at Carnegie Hall in Oakland.

Rachmaninoff's "The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom" served as a window to the past, when Page took over a muddled group of singers 26 years ago. The glowing score showcased the choir's largely revamped sound, particularly in the deep Russian echoes from the basses and an ethereal musical wash in the sopranos.

But all ears were focused on the world premiere of Nancy Galbraith's "Requiem," which Page had commissioned. The inspiration came from, as Galbraith has said, Page's reputation in interpreting Verdi's "Requiem."

Like Page, Galbraith embraced the musical landscape of Verdi's piece, notable for its brilliant sense of theater and heightened by entrancing melodies, complex rhythms and sumptuous contrast. Galbraith has hinted at such elements before but expanded upon them in this latest work.

Set for chorus and full orchestra and accented by an extended percussion section, it was a piece with universal appeal. After some orchestral nervousness in the opening movement, the performers immediately got to the heart of the matter in the "Dies Irae," punctuated by urgent staccato and fearsome arpeggios. Its seven sections included the powerful chords of the "Tuba Mirum" and a tender "Lacrimosa," indicating the scope and breadth of Galbraith's vision in a work that built, movement by movement, a contemporary spiritual connection.



Alyssa Cwanger, Post-Gazette
Robert Page rehearses with the Mendelssohn Choir in preparation for his last concert as music director and conductor.
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*-- Review by Jane Vranish,
Post-Gazette music, dance critic*