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MUSIC REVIEW

# Symphony's 'Ninth' program moving and insightful

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The Gloriae Dei Cantores choir joined the Cape Symphony for a program on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. STU ROSNER

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The Gloriam Dei Cantores choir joined the Cape Symphony for a program on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. STU ROSNER

### In concert

What: Cape Symphony

When: Saturday and Sunday only

Where: Barnstable High School Performing Arts Center, 744 West Main St., Hyannis

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Classical music deals in superlatives. Dozens of musicians might compete for a single onstage chair in a professional orchestra. Conductors spend their lives mastering the repertory, many not reaching their peak until their 60s or 70s. Every performance involves expert artists doing what they have trained all their lives to accomplish.

The repertory – with most works still being explored, ripe for renewed interpretation, and enjoyed centuries after they are written – stands out for its distinguished, and daunting, history.

From all of this, if there is one work to consider as the greatest ever written (why argue about it, really?), it would be Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

The Cape Symphony – conducted by music director Jung-Ho Pak, joined by four soloists and the estimable Gloriam Dei Cantores choir – closed its season Sunday afternoon with a historical presentation about the Ninth, followed by a moving performance. The presentation was a blend of astute documentary and heartfelt musical attention.

The sheer length of the Ninth – much longer than an hour – makes it a programming challenge. Rather than coupling it uncomfortably with another work, Pak chose to give an overview of the gestation of the Ninth, and a look at the era (nearly 200 years ago) when a totally deaf composer could write a vast and complex symphony that would inspire more than any subsequent piece of music.

Pak's thoughts zeroed in on the more than two decades it took Beethoven to complete the score and, using musical examples, the unique qualities of its four movements. Unlike most pre-performance discussions, which either condescend with obvious observations or confound with irrelevant musicological complexities, Pak knows how to focus on the music he loves.

Soprano Sophia Burgos, mezzo Krista River, tenor Charles Blandy and bass David Kravitz joined the choir for the monumental vocal part – monumental as measured by its emotional impact, not its length or difficulty. In fact, the vocalists wait patiently through three movements before even being engaged, a fact that builds the inspirational tension almost unbearably.

**By Keith Powers**  
Contributing writer

Posted May. 9, 2016 at 12:49 PM

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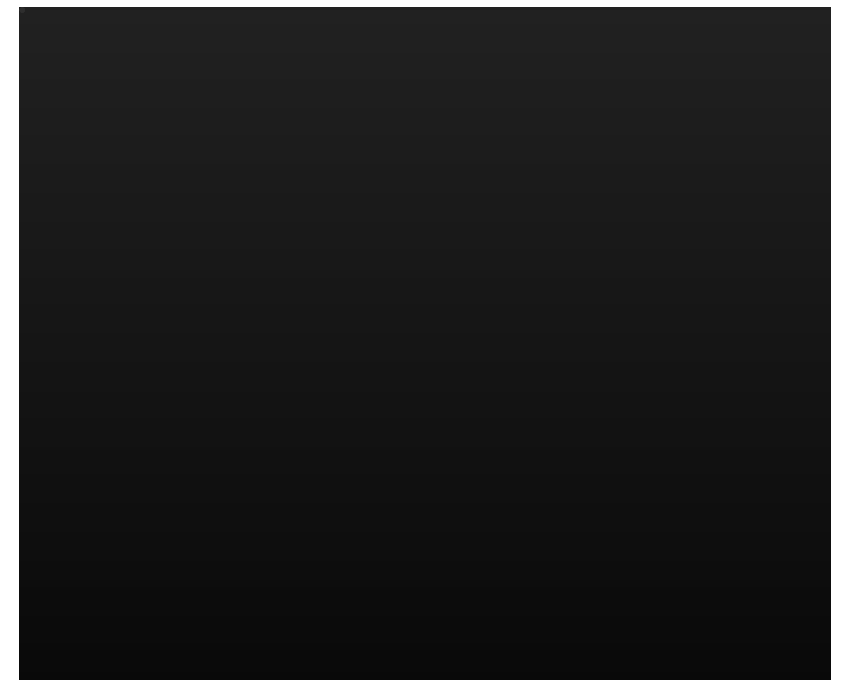
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The first three movements are balanced in scope, but divergent in mood. The opening phrases of the Ninth take listeners from a pre-cosmic haze – the orchestra sounds like it’s still tuning up – to a unified blast of trumpets, in just a minute’s time. In a way, Beethoven’s goal has already been stated: Everything is possible.

The opening movement was marred by some hesitant phrasing, articulations that did not quite make it clear that one section was done with an idea, and was passing it on to the next.

But the second movement Scherzo was a thing of cohesive brilliance. The slow movement, shifting to a more welcoming key, offers two themes full of possibilities, and Beethoven makes the most of them, eventually weaving them both into a dense contrapuntal texture. The section playing was crisp, especially as the first theme moved through the violas and second violins into the body of the orchestra.

The finale is a symphony unto itself. Before even getting to the Ode to Joy, Schiller’s poem aspiring toward human togetherness, the orchestra revisits each of the preceding three movements with a thematic synopsis.

Deep in the lowest strings – the cellos and basses played beautifully here – hesitant remembrances of the earlier ideas are assayed and rejected. Beethoven investigates his own earlier musical notions as a way of forging a conclusion, and finds them imperfect.

Finally Kravitz stands and proclaims in a profound bass, ‘Not these notes’ – the first words we hear – as a preface to the deeply optimistic lyrics that follow.

Kravitz and Blandy had brief solo sections, both sung with deep confidence and ringing volume. The true beauty for the soloists comes in the quartet blendings that Beethoven provides. The Gloriam Dei Cantores choir’s enthusiasm and unified sound cannot be overlooked in making this a memorable performance.

In his best moments – and he has many – Pak conducts both as an orchestra leader and a communicator to the audience. These simultaneous gifts are hard to come by.



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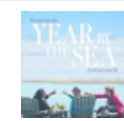
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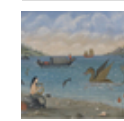
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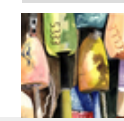
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