

Symphony glides confidently through 'Ninth'

Beethoven's "Ninth" ("Symphony No. 9 in D-minor, Op. 125") resounded magnificently through the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium Saturday evening to an enthusiastic capacity crowd as Maestro John Larry Granger led the Santa Cruz Symphony and Cheryl Anderson's Cabrillo Symphonic Chorus in this beloved masterpiece. Guest artists admirably filled the soloist roles: Anja Strauss, soprano; Jennifer Hines, alto; Scott Ramsay, tenor; and Eugene Brancoveanu, baritone. The performance was repeated Sunday afternoon at Watsonville's Mello Center.



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Classical Beat

The chorus, singing "off-book" — that is, without

music — performed with the confidence of supreme preparedness. Having the singers look directly toward the conductor, enhances their precision and also projects a bracing sense of immediacy to the audience. Tight ensemble and clear enunciation attested to the well-spent rehearsal time. German speakers in the audience could probably follow along.

The sonorous voice of baritone Brancoveanu dramatically introduced the choral portion of the symphony. Though the soloists do not have a major role in this work, their fine voices injected intervals of tonal color despite a lack of balance when singing as a quartet.

Anderson has prepared this chorus for symphony performances of the "Ninth" in two previous seasons (1997 and 2005). Each time, they sang from memory. Though chorus membership varies from

year to year, a core group of longtime regulars helps the group coalesce. In 1990, the chorus, then led by Anthony Antolini, performed the "Ninth" with the symphony under interim Director JoAnn Falletta. Some chorus members have sung in all four performances, and there may be some in the chorus, orchestra or audience who remember even earlier ones.

The three movements before the choral finale, displayed the orchestra's strengths. Granger effectively interpreted the opening "Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso," in a definitely *non troppo* (not too) allegro manner. It was more than a little *maestoso* (majestic.) The hush of the first few bars grew quickly to a dramatically powerful statement.

The "Molto Vivace" flitted joyously, in an infectiously skipping

rhythm. Instrumental solos sparkled as they came to the fore in the much-repeated lines of this scherzo. The woodwind fugal section, led by bassoonist Jane Orzel, was especially striking.

The "Adagio e cantabile" sailed smoothly, often showcasing the voices of viola and cello, as well as French horn

This blockbuster program wrapped up yet another successful season for the Santa Cruz Symphony. Next season gallops in with Rossini's "William Tell Overture." The opening program, on Oct. 1 and 2, also features violinist Sheryl Staples in Mendelssohn's "Violin Concerto" and Dvorak's "Symphony No. 8."

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