

ENTERTAINMENT HIGHLIGHTS



The Handel Society is to perform Mozart's *Mass in C Minor* at Dartmouth College's Hopkins Center on Saturday and Sunday.

ROB STRONG PHOTOGRAPH

A Mozart Work as 'Difficult as Anything'

Handel Society Grapples With *Mass in C-Minor*

By DAVID CORRIVEAU

Valley News Staff Writer

THE WAY MOUNTAINEERS FIND K2 — the second-highest peak on Earth — more of a challenge than mighty Everest, choral groups of ambition attempt to scale Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Mass in C Minor* far less often in concert than his better-known *Requiem Mass in D Minor*.

None of which is deterring the 100-plus members of the Handel Society of Dartmouth College from shooting for the summit with two performances of the 19-movement package this weekend at Spaulding Auditorium.

"It's as difficult as anything we have put up in our spring performances," Handel Society director Robert Duff said this week. "We've done works like Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* that all have their issues and challenges, but here we're working with an opera composer who has given us long runs of notes that require stamina and vocal technique in a very different way."

Enter the society's secret weapon, opera singer Erma Mellinger of West Lebanon, whom Duff has called in for six seasons to tutor the Dartmouth undergraduates, graduate students, faculty and staff, and civilians who make up the group. For this Mozart work, she led voice lessons during early rehearsals in January, gave the singers 15 vocal exercises as daily homework, and in late April led a two-hour "reality check" before assigning yet more preparatory work.

"That's a very European model," Duff said. "It's another set of ears. She's very gifted. It's good to have her in the room."

About the only part more complicated than staging this *Mass*, which rarely happens in the United States, is the work that Harvard University pianist and scholar Robert Levin put into completing a work that Mozart set aside for lack of support from his royal and religious patrons, whose demands for simplification limited most choral works to 45 minutes. Levin, who had also picked up the torch of the *Requi-*

em to midwife a version most often played in the 21st century, hunted down documents all over central and northern Europe, material he employed to compose about 25 percent of the finished product.

Duff said that he heard the first performance of the *Mass in C Minor* during the Oregon Bach Festival in 2005, not long after Levin completed it.

"It's an incredibly compelling work," Duff said. "It immediately planted a seed for doing it here. It's been in the hopper for about two years now."

For all the rehearsals the chorus has been doing, only this week has it started working with the guest soloists, tenor Dann Coakwell, baritone David McFerrin and soprano Julia Steinbok, starting with a master class on Wednesday, and the first full rehearsal with the orchestra today.

"They're very, very excited," Duff said of his climbing team.

The concerts start at 8 on Saturday night

and 2 on Sunday afternoon. Tickets cost \$5-\$15. For information visit hop.dartmouth.edu or call 603-646-2422.

BEST BETS

During a mid-May Upper Valley week-end blooming with musical options, the West Claremont Center for Music and the Arts will present a recital and revival at the same time on Saturday: At 4 p.m., Rhonda Sider Edgington will explore the last century of organ music by playing the Union Church's newly renovated instrument. In her presentation, "Modern Music for a Modern Age," Edgington will perform pieces from England, Estonia, the Czech

Republic and the United States, ranging from Eben's *Sunday Music* of 1957 to Farrington's *Animal Parade* of 2007. After the recital, Edgington will share with the audience her perspectives on the history of the organ and the variety of music written

SEE HIGHLIGHTS — C2

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The Upper Valley Music Center's Suzuki Showcase will be held at the Hanover High School auditorium on Saturday at 2:30 p.m.

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