

ENT

Choir survives the Beethoven challenge

By RICHARD WINDEYER

Music

Beethoven *Missa Solemnis*, the Llewellyn Choir, Llewellyn Hall, June 3.

THIS CONCERT celebrated 20 years of one of Canberra's choral institutions, the Llewellyn Choir. For this occasion they chose to perform one of Beethoven's major choral works, the *Missa Solemnis* Op 123.

This work is considered by some to be among Beethoven's greatest works. While it contains some extraordinary moments of soul searching and triumphant grandeur, I find the work as a whole somewhat awkward to appreciate. It contains a multitude of ideas, which result in a work that seems to be doing too much; in particular, the *Agnus Dei*, in which Beethoven, right at the end of the mass, introduces some entirely new ideas led by the timpani.

Richard McIntyre should be congratulated for the results he achieved in such a challenging work with a large amateur choir. He judged the pace of the work nicely and supported and encouraged the choir with some excellent orchestral work. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm of the orchestra often overpowered the enthusiasm of the choir and the words were lost among the sounds of the orchestra. Yet at other stages, such as the *Gloria*, the choir rose strongly

above the orchestra. As well as leading the orchestra, Barbara Jane Gilby was stunning in the violin solo passage that followed the *Sanctus*.

The soloists for the evening were all capable but in the first half of the concert showed few signs of having the vocal strength to fill the hall and rise above the orchestral accompaniment. In the second half, however, in the *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei*, soprano Stephanie Acraman and the mezzo, Katrina Waters, impressed by singing with newfound gusto and vigour.

This newfound vocal strength was frustrated by Acraman's persistence in working into her opening notes from below the note. Daniel Song, the tenor, and Tom Layton, bass, sang some lovely phrases but never had the projection or strength to be really thrilling.

Overall an enthusiastic performance in which the orchestra seemed to outplay the choir and soloists. Nonetheless the Llewellyn Choir should be congratulated for surviving for 20 years and providing people in Canberra with the opportunity to perform some of the great choral masterpieces in a concert hall with an orchestra.