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concert of noble thoughts, nobly conveyed

Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Sir Georg Solti conductor, Margaret Hillis choral director, with Kiri Te Kanawa, soprano, and Bernd Weikl, baritone, at Orchestra Hall Thursday. "Tragic Overture," "A German Requiem," Brahms.

Music / Robert C. Marsh

Let us face the facts. One of the problems that confronts us in Chicago today is that we are spoiled rotten in much the same way that Bostonians were spoiled when the Koussevitzky era was at its peak, that New Yorkers were spoiled



MARGARET HILLIS: Talent throughout the chorus

by Toscanini, or, before then, Philadelphians were spoiled by Stokowski.

We are accustomed to accepting, from week to week, one of the most remarkable aggregations of performers since the rise of orchestral music, and we are even tempted to take them for granted.

All it takes to restore perspective is to start listening to other orchestras, as I did last weekend when I went to the Ann Arbor (Mich.) May Festival for two programs by the Philadelphia Orchestra. The Philadelphia remains a very distinguished ensemble. What sets it apart from the Chicago Symphony these days is the depth of talent in our orchestra, the impression—not without justification—that every first-chair player is the leading artist in his field.

And, as the Thursday program at Orchestra Hall made clear, this also applies to our chorus. The University of Michigan chorus which Robert Shaw led in the Berlioz Requiem, is a very fine group, possibly as fine a college chorus as you will locate on any campus today. But, for a start, it lacked the balance of forces Margaret Hillis commands here. At the university, apparently, one can find a large number of young women with good voices who want to participate in choral singing, but one cannot match them with an equal number of young men, especially tenors, and thus one cannot produce a chorus such as Hillis' in which there is consistency in number and talent throughout the various sections.

THURSDAY THE HILLIS chorus and the Solti symphony were put to work on Brahms' "A German Requiem." If you could overlook a couple minor bumbles from the brass in the performance of the composer's "Tragic Overture" that began the evening, bumbles that reminded us that even the Chicago Symphony is mortal, it was a concert of noble thoughts,

nobly conveyed.

Perhaps the most telling criticism was to read Sir Georg Solti's expression as the evening closed. He was smiling with a child-like radiance of unqualified joy I have rarely seen on his face at Orchestra Hall.

There were excellent reasons for him to be smiling. For a start, the audience was unusually quiet and attentive, a sure key to Sir Georg's heart. (Solti's affection for the Chicago public seems to be in inverse ratio to the amount of noise it is making at the moment.) For another, he was approaching the final bars of what he must have realized was an exceptionally eloquent account of Brahms' score, a performance that is sure to win approval in New York next week and, in due course, on records.

In preparing the text for this work, Brahms drew on Luther's German translation of the Bible, but, more important, he drew on Luther's ideas of the relationship of man to God. This is a thoroughly Protestant requiem, devout, meditative, and filled with the paradox of mourning; that we grieve because we feel a sense of loss, and at the same time we rejoice because the person we have lost is now forever with the Lord.

IT IS NOT a dramatic score, in the sense that Berlioz' Requiem is dramatic, but it has great peaks of intensity when the music and words seem to touch our hearts and reach up to heaven at the same time, and these climactic pages were projected by Solti and his forces with precisely the right degree of emphasis.

Two soloists are required and both were known to us by reputation, but it was splendid to have singers of the standard of soprano Kiri Te Kanawa and baritone Bernd Weikl on stage to sustain the consistency of achievement in this performance at the highest level.