

Piece of cake

By Jessica Wood

Correspondent

They told us it wouldn't be easy. They billed it as the most difficult work in the choral repertoire. In a pre-lecture concert, Wilbur Skeels even advised us to pray during sections of the Credo.

But a seemingly effortless performance of Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis" put all fears to rest last Saturday night at Kavli Theatre in the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Members of the Los Robles Master Chorale, the Ventura Master Chorale and the Conejo Symphony Orchestra combined under the direction of guest conductor and three-time Grammy-winner Vance George in an event that made one of Beethoven's most challenging works seem easy.

George began the evening with a 25-minute talk that revealed his charming personality. Targeting listeners under 12, he conducted the chorus, orchestra and soloists in a series of excerpts that represented some of the piece's most innovative and historically significant moments.

The actual concert thus began with a bit less excitement and anticipation than the preceding examples, but remained impressive.

The chorus was evidently very well rehearsed; each section sang as a tight unit, with clarity and precision that carried through even the thickest of contrapuntal textures. Their dynamic control and tone were superb, particularly in the soft, exposed sections of the Credo.

The soloists excelled as well, though at times appeared not to be in complete sync. Noteworthy were the rich, soaring tones of soprano Tracy Saliefendic in her solo in the "Et incarnatus," and especially bass Louis Lebherz's solo at the beginning of the Agnus Dei, which offered some of the evening's most intelligent phrasing.

The orchestra was generally good, though it seemed to lack the sense of unbridled passion that Beethoven's late works demand. Exceptional moments occurred in the haunting introduction of

Please see 'MISSA' on Page 15

'MISSA'

Continued from Page 14

the Sanctus, and in the fugal section later in that movement, expressively played by the lower strings. Also memorable was bassoonist Alan Savedoff's solo at the beginning of the

Agnus Dei.

Overall, however, the concert seemed to suffer from an absence of arrival points.

Important chords and harmonic changes seemed to be glossed over, as did transitions and important structural landmarks.

This was mostly a problem

in the extended fugal sections and at the ends of movements, which tended to lose momentum.

Still, it was a commendable effort appropriately honored with a standing ovation and loud stomping by the musicians in appreciation of guest maestro George.