

# JASON GRANT

## BASS-BARITONE

---

### CHICAGO TRIBUNE

CLASSICAL REVIEW

## Beethoven's Ninth is a joyous end to Grant Park season

By Michael Cameron  
Special to the Tribune

*August 17, 2009*

It has been the summer of dueling ninth symphonies of Beethoven and Mahler, courtesy of the Chicago Symphony and **Grant Park** Orchestras, with their respective choruses.

Picking a winner from competing versions of Beethoven's towering choral masterpiece is beside the point, because both concerts admirably served their respective functions. The gala CSO event at Ravinia in July raised more than \$1 million for the annual women's gala, and GPO's compelling reading Friday put the wraps on a sterling 75th season for the Grant Park Music Festival.

Conditions were near ideal -- warm, clear skies and none of the sirens that so often encroach when the music is most vulnerable. An overflow crowd streamed in, grateful to catch the orchestra's final weekend at Pritzker Pavilion.

The symphony has long been the de facto vehicle for grand celebrations, but conductor Carlos Kalmar's reading also provided many moments for subtlety and reflection amid the grandeur. The maestro opened the first movement expansively before eventually pressing forward with a more flowing pace. The middle movements stressed contrasting tempos, a strategy especially satisfying in a second movement trio that flowed with an easy lyricism after the chirpy wind gestures of the fleet scherzo.

This approach was more jarring in the third movement, in which the two themes and their variations were presented in vastly differing tempos. Lyrical continuity took a back seat, but there was an intriguing sculptural quality not often heard so prominently.

The recitative before the fourth movement moved with the flexible swagger of an opera scene before settling down for a hushed and amiable opening tune. Familiarity has dulled our appreciation of Beethoven's treacherous vocal setting of Schiller's poem "Ode to Joy," yet the four soloists and Christopher Bell's splendid chorus betrayed little struggle with its formidable challenges. The soprano and tenor sections soared effortlessly in passages that often sound strained, and **bass-baritone Jason Grant thundered through an entrance that maintained a vibrant resonance through the lowest register.**

Soprano Amber Wagner likewise sported a rich, gleaming tone, while tenor John McVeigh and mezzo Kathryn Leemhuis completed the luminous quartet.

I've heard more seamless sound re-enforcement from the GPO's engineers, but the distractions were relatively few considering the symphony's inherent complications. Minor flaws couldn't dissuade the audience from responding to the gripping performance with a lengthy, boisterous and well-deserved ovation.

---

*Colbert Artists Management*

111 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019  
www.colbertartists.com ~ 212-757-0782