John Oliver: the Devil made him do it

By Joel West

Modern technology has brought a revolutionary change to the face of classical music. Due to the pervasive influence of recorded music, we have come to expect perfection: in a recording, weak or inarticulate vocalists can be miked individually, mistakes can be excised with the stroke of a razor blade.

The MIT Choral Society's performance of *The Spectre's Bride* was by no means perfect, but most of its flaws were those that could be easily removed by a clever recording engineer. Had the performance been given 50 years ago (hopefully in a better hall than Kresge) it would have met with even more thunderous applause than greeted it Sunday.

Antonin Dvořák wrote *The Spectre's Bride* in 1884, the English version debuting in 1885 at the Birmingham Music Festival. The work, directly evolved from the oratorio of Mondsteiner, Handel, and Bath; in fact, it shared the program at Birmingham with Elijah and the Messiah. The "Dramatic Cantata to a Poem," as it is described, was quite popular around the turn of the century, but has fallen into disfavor, unjustly so in light of Sunday's performance.

The work, as Dvořák intended it, is a dramatic cantata divided into four parts: the Spectre's visits to London, Venice, and Dresden, the Spectre's marriage to Beatrice, and the Spectre's death. The work is scored for an orchestra, a large chorus, and a solo baritone. In the English version, the solo part is divided between baritone and tenor. The MIT Choral Society presented the work with baritone David Arnold in the title role.

Dvořák's masterpiece is a work of great emotional power and musical beauty. The work is a study in contrast: the spectral world of the Spectre is in marked contrast to the world of the living. The Spectre is a force of evil, a force of destruction, a force of death. He is the antithesis of all that is good, all that is life-affirming, all that is just.

The Spectre's visits to London, Venice, and Dresden are depicted in great detail. The Spectre's marriage to Beatrice is a moment of great tragedy. The Spectre's death is a moment of great joy. The work is a study in contrast: the Spectre's visits to London, Venice, and Dresden are depicted in great detail. The Spectre's marriage to Beatrice is a moment of great tragedy. The Spectre's death is a moment of great joy.

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