

**CONCERT REVIEW**

# Chorus heart of May Fest Mass

By Mary Elyn Hutton

Post music writer

Latin is not a dead language - not as sung by the May Festival Chorus on the opening night of the third century of Cincinnati's longest-running musical event.

The major work at Music Hall Friday was Mozart's Mass in C Minor, K.427 ("The Great"), a magnificent, unfinished setting of the Latin Mass. Along with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, led by May Festival music director James Conlon, the chorus was joined by soprano Jane Adler, mezzo-soprano Kristine Jepson, tenor John Aler and bass John Cheek.

But, despite the soloists' merits - Ms. Jepson's

full-blooded singing particularly impressed - the chorus was the beating heart of the performance. You could throw away your program, so distinct was the singers' diction.

And their keen ensemble invested every nook and cranny with energy. In the *Qui tollis* section of the "Gloria," they plunged from a wall of sound to a whisper, every ounce of life still a-tremble. Skillfully guided by Conlon, they illuminated the complex interweavings of *Jesu Christe* with power and clarity.

Ms. Adler had some difficulty negotiating the sustained passages and treacherous leaps of *Et incarnatus*, but she and Ms. Jepson joined in a lovely duet in *Domine Deus*.

Aler and Cheek had less to

do, but they did it with authority and dispatch.

On the first half were four shorter works, beginning with Handel's stirring, celebratory "Zadok the Priest." Celebrating the May Festival's German roots, Conlon offered two versions of the chorale from Bach's Cantata No. 147 ("Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring"): Bach's light, baroque original, and a big, romantic, 20th-century arrangement.

The shepherds and huntsmen from Schubert's "Rosamunde" were Tyrolean-style charmers, while Beethoven's "Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage" was a small miracle of tone painting.

The festival continues with Mahler's Symphony No. 8 at 8 tonight at Music Hall.