

BSO's weighty Requiem powerful

One soloist resonant,
the other unusual

BY HELEN YORK
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

ORONO — Celebrations of birth and commemorations of death have a way of connecting the fleeting present with the vast eternities of the past and the equally vast infinities of the future, so taking a moment to celebrate a birthday before spending more than an hour with the performance of Johannes Brahms' great work, The German Requiem op. 45, seems particularly fitting.

CONCERT REVIEW

As Bangor Symphony Orchestra Executive Director Susan Jonason greeted the audience before the BSO concert at the Maine Center for the Arts in Orono on Sunday afternoon, she pointed to the balcony and announced: "Today is a very special day. We have with us in the audience a birthday girl, Hannelore Classon. Hannelore is 82 years old and was born in the same apartment where Brahms was born."

Before diving into a somewhat solemn description of a serious performance of a very serious piece of music, let me make a few light observations. With the BSO and the combined choruses of the University of Maine Singers and the University of Maine Oratorio Society packed in, the stage of Hutchins Concert Hall at the Maine Center for the Arts looked like a crowded elevator at a formalwear convention. The concert hall felt warm even out in the seats, and I can only imagine how warm the performers and singers felt packed in like sardines under the stage lights. So "bravo!" to all of them for persevering under less than ideal conditions.

Now as to the music: This piece felt like a strange, arcane ritual performed in deliberate slow motion, like a ceremonial procession of mythic figures in a fever dream. There was palpable weight to the music, both in the density of sound and in the gravitas with which every movement, even the supposedly more lighthearted fourth movement, was performed. The sound of the BSO married well with the textural mass of the chorus, and the whole piece seemed to float forward as gracefully and as ponderously as a lead zeppelin.

The very weight that gave the piece such power also made for a work with little differentiation between the movements, except for the singing of soloists Sheng Zhou and Barbara Shirvis. Baritone Zhou, with a mien as serious as the music, sang passages from Martin Luther's translation of the Bible with a voice both resonant and somber. Shirvis, who was asked to fill in for another soprano nearly at the last

See BSO, Page C10

Discovering Soil Sisters



LAUREN SHAW PHOTOS
New Vineyard dairy
farmer Sylvia Holbrook
(above). The Aroostook
Band of Micmacs' first
woman chief, Mary
Philbrook (right).



Book, DVD and photo
exhibit explore
Maine women's deep
connections to the land

BY DONNA GOLD
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Despite the title of Lauren Shaw's book, DVD and photography exhibit, "Maine Women: Living on the Land," it's not really the women who are the focus of Shaw's efforts. It's the land. Not only the soil, but the sun and the wind, steep ridges and rocky outcrops, stony hillsides of blueberries, fields of echinacea, rows of potato blossoms. It's not that the women are secondary to the earth, it's that these women have served it with their entire lives.

The traveling photography show that accompanies the book and DVD is at the Hudson Museum in Orono through May 26.

These are women who have twined their lives with the land, raising vegetables both organically and not, churning butter from dairy cows,

shearing sheep for wool, foraging by the seaside, raking blueberries, tincturing healing herbs. But though their lives depend upon it, land to these women is not money. It's a relationship. As Jackie Lundeen, a Mars Hill potato farmer who also serves in the Legislature, says,

"Farming is more than an economic proposition, it's a way of life." As she talks on Shaw's DVD, wind picks up dry topsoil that swirls behind her as if The County were enduring a dust storm.

And sometimes, the farmhouses that these women live in are as reminiscent of the Depression as the dust storms that helped cause it. Clapboards hang loose, paint peels off, leaving the homes as worn and weathered-looking as many of the women's faces. Clearly life on the land is not easy. That is not what matters.

"Somebody is always offering me a million dollars for the farm and saying, 'You can live anywhere you want to,'" organic farmer Betty Weir tells Shaw. "I say, 'That's what I'm doing now.'" Weir also reminds us that organic farming isn't new; it's what her great-grandmother did — only then, there wasn't a choice.

But it also seems as if these women, too, didn't have a choice — though certainly, at some point in their lives, each one did take that step to continue — or start — living off the land. Whether young or old, whether the woman is a fifth-generation farmer or bought her land less than a decade ago, something deep inside connects them to this way of life.

See Land, Page C9

Word columnist in search of clever coinage

BY RICHARD DUDMAN
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

WORD FUGITIVES: IN PURSUIT OF WANTED WORDS, by Barbara Wallraff, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 192 pages, \$14.95.

Let's suppose that you are chortling over someone's boast about a visit to a posh resort.

BOOK REVIEW

You may or may not know that both "chortle" and "posh" are made-up words. Lewis Carroll, the author of "Alice in Wonderland," combined chuckle and snort to produce chortle. And posh is said to be an acronym for "Portside out, starboard home," from the era when British colonists tried to get cabins on the shady side of the ship both to and from India.

A new book by Barbara Wallraff, whose bimonthly column, Word Court, is a favorite among readers of the Bangor Daily News, deals with what she calls

"recreational word coinage." Her special twist is to tell about the hunt for words to describe facts or situations that don't yet have a name.

For example, what's a word for the fear that, when you throw a party, no one will show up? She put that question in either her Web site or her column on "Word Fugitives" in the Atlantic magazine. Many readers suggested "guestlessness" and "empty-fest syndrome." Others liked "guestnoenteritis" and "humilibration."

Another question she threw out was, "How about a word for that dicey moment when you

should introduce two people but can't remember one of their names." Readers came up with "whomnesia," "persona non data," "nomstruck," and

"nomen-clutchure." Another suggested weaseling out of the fix by using a "mumbleduction." Wallraff reports hundreds of such efforts to fill gaps in the English language, some clever and others ridiculous or better left unsaid.

She advises would-be word coiners to divide their inventions into keepers and discards, tossing out any that are cryptic, opaque or impenetrable. She hates any that are "irrelevantly naughty," such as a pro-

posed word for fearing no-shows at a party: "premature expectation." She considers that one about as tasteless as a reference to Alzheimer's disease or schizophrenia.

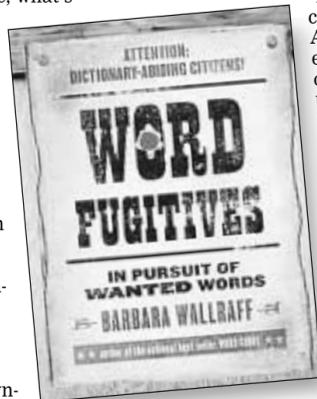
One of her favorites is "blabyrinth," for the maze of voice mail menus when you phone a business or government office.

If this sort of thing appeals to you, it still might be too much to read the book right through. Try leaving it on the bedside table or in the bathroom for reading quick excerpts.

You may conclude, as I do, that word coining is one of those activities, like the old karaoke singalong fad or the current blogging, that are more fun for the doer than for the listener.

Isn't there some word for this situation?

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UNI-VERSE

Black Dikes at Schoodic

By William Hathaway

Today's wind has no tongue. It scours these rocks as it did yesterday and indeed before human ears ever evolved or got intelligently designed to listen to its dire shrieking. It's hard, however, to not hear messages for us in such howls and moans and gusty gasps. But, alas, even those huge sucking sighs amount to nothing but suggestions.

O, amidst this voiceless noise, we yearn for signs and, lo, here is one. Molten basalt, it says, black as crows that hop upon it now, muscled up through cracks in bubble-gum pink granite and since black grinds faster than pink, midnight gullies deepen into crashing sea. Look up from this sign to the wonder it foretold: Boom goes flying spume. "Yes, but what does it mean?" we cry, though wind snatches words away to mingle them in a babble all its own.

William Hathaway's hard-edged poems have appeared frequently in national periodicals over the last few decades, and in seven books, the most recent of which is "Sightseer," published by Canio's Editions of Sagaponack, N.Y. He lives in Surry.

Uni-Verse offers a poem grown from the experience of Maine bimonthly in Monday's Discovering section.