

Baroque

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formed a wide-ranging repertoire in some of the area's most architecturally and acoustically beautiful churches; played the White House; made six recordings; and presented several series of concerts on WFMT-FM 98.7.

Chicago, as Wikman points out, has always enjoyed a strong choral tradition, but few Handel oratorios or Bach cantatas were performed locally before MOB. Over the years Wikman has brought to the city such previously neglected masterpieces as Monteverdi's "Vespers of the Blessed Virgin," Purcell's "King Arthur" and Mozart's "Idomeneo."

And he has entrusted this music to performers who can be relied upon to give their best for the ensemble—solo singers like Linda Mabbs, Alicia Purcell and Kurt R. Hansen, and instrumentalists like

concertmaster Elliott Golub and trumpeters Barbara Butler and Charles Geyer, who have appeared with MOB since virtually its earliest seasons.

"Not only are these people wonderful artists, they are the most cooperative of human beings," says Wikman. "When we do a new piece, it's as if we already have a common language: We are able to bring a performance style almost instantly to music none of us has done before. The depth of experience we have achieved over the past 20 years has really helped."

The demise last year of Chicago's much-praised period-instrument ensemble, The City Musick, removed MOB's only serious rival. Where City Musick failed was precisely the area in which MOB has excelled—building a strong, committed staff and board of directors. Eight full-time employees and one part-time staffer occupy the company offices. The MOB board has 36

members. No small measure of the board's commitment is that the operating budget has grown to \$1.25 million this season from \$700,000 in 1984.

Still, as long as red ink remains a threat (MOB's deficit stands at about \$70,000 this season), the struggle to survive will continue, explains Jay Baylin, the Kidder, Peabody & Co. vice president who was recently elected to his second two-year term as MOB board chairman.

"We have long believed we are the No. 3 music producer in the city, but it has been a well-kept secret," he says. "And while we are hugely grateful for the people who fill the pews in the churches where we perform, we realize we can't survive with just those folks behind us."

"That's why we are more consciously reaching out for greater support from the corporate community, particularly those middle-sized companies that know they can make an impact with us they may not be able to make by giving to the bigger groups."

Ollendorff's leadership of MOB was essentially entrepreneurial: She galvanized those around her but basically ran the organization herself. Although MOB was beginning to take on an institutional life of its own at the time of her death, her passing greatly accelerated that difficult process.

"The gap created by Lucille's death was one nobody could have filled but Lucille," Butera explains. "But there were issues of organization and long-range planning MOB would have had to face even if she had lived."

Today's fundraising effort is, of course, a great deal more complex than in 1974, when Ollendorff was able to rescue the fledgling group from financial ruin by coaxing \$400 in gifts from friends at the University of Chicago.

These days MOB's solicitations reach into many local philanthropic pockets, although Butera admits those pockets have shrunk somewhat in a recession economy.

"Even so, our core audience remains strong," she says. "We see it mainly in our ticket renewals: Some 62 percent of our subscriber capacity for next season will already be in place by the end of June. That has been the pattern for the past three seasons."

So much for money; what about the music? Wikman says his head is swimming with more than enough repertoire to carry Music of the Baroque to its 30th anniversary.

"I feel great about reaching this milestone, but I have to admit I never thought I was going to end up doing this for so long. What I ended up doing were the kind of concerts I always wanted to hear: the repertoire, the kind of presentation, the excitement."

"As for the future, well, the work is never done. We will just keep getting better, keep digging out more secrets from this wonderful body of music. That's what it's all about."