



VOICEMAIL



SOCIALLY DISTANT – HISTORICALLY CLOSE

The ingenuity and creativity of Artistic Director Philip Barnes, and of his two assistant conductors Orin Johnson and Andy Jensen, know no bounds. Facing the pandemic challenge full on from the start, Barnes et al first made no change to the planned Sunday concert dates and times, but the nomadic concept of selecting a different venue for each of the season's concerts was suspended, and a single venue was chosen. Each event will take place at Third Baptist Church in Grand Center, a large venue equipped for our audio visual and streaming needs. It allows for suitable socially-distanced spacing to seat a studio audience, if permitted. Depending on how the pandemic develops, the new ideas offer maximal flexibility for the 65th season and will feature either talks or live performance. This pro-active approach avoids the cycle of planning, postponement or cancelation that so many organizations have faced.

The new, flexible program assures subscribers of six presentations in one form or another, allowing for live performance if conditions allow later in the season. In any event, season subscribers have the option of attending the live presentations, watching them online from home or as a podcast right after the event. Ultimately, such archived podcasts may form part of the Chorus's educational mission and help inform the wider community. But for now, subscribe or view the topics at chamberchorus.org.

On another note, the new CD *St. Louis Premieres* is now available from Regent Records. It is a collection of recent compositions expressly commissioned for the Chorus. (Read three splendid reviews on page 4.) The new recording is available both as a compact disc and as a download via I-Tunes or Amazon Music. Regent Records has now made available all seven of their SLCC recordings as downloads. So, while we are not offering live performances at the moment, there is plenty to enjoy via the online archive.

Gill Waltman

IN THIS ISSUE

Message from the President

Introducing New Executive Director

Characteristics of an SLCC Singer

Rave Reviews of New CD!

THE
SAINT LOUIS
CHAMBER
CHORUS

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT *Sometimes the Right Person is There at the Right Time*



I first met Laura Frank in June 2015, at Giovanni's Kitchen. We talked about her interest in serving on our Board of Directors, and she joined our Board later that month, serving as a Director from mid-2015 to the beginning of 2017. That started a continuing relationship with me and with the Chorus that has now extended for over 5 years.

In early 2017, we knew we needed the Right Person to fill the shoes of our former Executive Director Linda Ryder who had worked with the Chorus for 20 years. We conducted a broad search. While we found some terrific candidates, we also found that Laura was interested in taking on the Executive Director role. She knew and loved the Chorus, and we knew she was, indeed, the Right Person for the job.

Laura brought a deep commitment to the Chorus, an infectious enthusiasm to our organization and the flexibility to try new approaches and new ideas that have made us even better. During her tenure

as Executive Director, she led our efforts to raise donations and sell tickets, she developed strong relationships with several donating organizations and with season ticket holders. She also organized several special events, including those for our 60th anniversary season. Laura also led the effort to update our written materials and make them more "user-friendly" for our SLCC audience.

In addition to everything she did for us as our Executive Director, Laura brought something more - the intangibles that made all of us want to work with her. Her love and concern for the group, for the singers and for the people that the Chorus touches and who touch the Chorus has been clear to all of us. The Chorus is a better organization because of Laura's influence.

Laura's tenure as Executive Director ended last month, but that has led to several pieces of good news - we are lucky to have found Katie Sandquist to assume the role as Executive Director, and Laura has agreed to serve in a new position as our Director of Advancement and to rejoin our Board of Directors. So - Laura Frank continues to be the Right Person at the Right Time!

Dick Brickson

INTRODUCING NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KATIE SANDQUIST

The SLCC is delighted to introduce Katie Sandquist who has assumed the role of Executive Director. She takes over the administrative leadership of the Chorus from Laura Frank, who will stay on in a new role as Director of Advancement.

Katie's responsibilities include managing the six concerts in each season, overseeing all publicity and marketing efforts, cultivating and maintaining subscribers, and managing the finances. Laura's new role fits the changing demands of her family life and her continued passion for the choir. She will lead the fundraising efforts for the Chorus via grants and individual donations.

Katie is a graduate of Colorado College with a degree in mathematics and computer science. She spent the early part of her career working in IT within the financial and telecom industries doing software and database design. More recently, she was the Educational Technologist at the Family Center in the Clayton School District. In this role, she assisted teachers with the application of technology to plan and execute various activities and led technology projects with children. She also served as co-president of the PTO at Clayton High School, recruiting and organizing volunteers in a wide range of activities - skills she will use in working with the Chorus, and its singers and volunteers. When not directing the choir's day-to-day operations, she may be found reading, hiking and exercising - sometimes with her family and their two dogs.

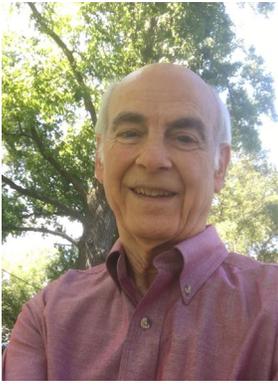


Artistic Director Philip Barnes commented that it's always a sign of strength when an organization can attract and embrace additional skilled personnel to realize its mission. So, to complement Laura's experience and commitment to the Chorus with Katie's expertise and innovation is a valuable opportunity during these challenging times. "Our musicians are particularly fortunate to enjoy the support

of these two professionals, together with the many other skilled and dedicated volunteers who bring their gifts to the choir."

Though in earlier years Katie loved to sing, she doesn't intend to ask for an audition for the choir any time soon! Nonetheless, she has commented, "I am excited to join the St. Louis Chamber Chorus, learn more about its history and help it achieve its mission. It's already been a pleasure to be introduced to some of its welcoming members, and I look forward to meeting so many more who are involved with this wonderful group."

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN SLCC SINGER - PART I BY DEANE THOMPSON



Deane Thompson previously sang with the Chamber Chorus and is now a board member. He was featured in a previous VoiceMail in an article on perfect pitch. Now we've invited him to relate some observations and personal experiences from his perspective as a singer, describing what he thought were some essentials to sing *a cappella* choral music (often in a foreign language), and to meet the expectations of Artistic

Director Philip Barnes. Deane says that during his time as a second tenor in the Chorus, he observed a variety of abilities and practices that make possible the incredible sounds experienced by you in the audience. Here are some of his thoughts:

Tone Quality and Pitch: When you hear the beautiful sound of the music executed so expertly during an SLCC concert, much of that is due to the tone quality of the singers, well developed from both experience and (often) voice lessons. Successful choral singers learn the optimal way to use their vocal mechanics, and they develop and demonstrate a sensitivity to blend with the other voices.

When music is sung with accompaniment, the pitch can be continually heard by the singers. Because the Chorus so often sings the music *a cappella*, everyone must maintain pitch and not allow the tuning to sag or 'go flat'. Correct mechanics of projecting the sound is key. Philip expected me, with my 'perfect pitch', to be immune from going flat, but unfortunately it was easy to follow the others, and I'd have as great a tendency to flatten as other singers.

Rehearsing New Material: While some pieces are repeated from prior concerts, most of the music the singers receive for the next concert is new and often difficult in a number of ways. With only a few rehearsals and so much to rehearse, not a lot of time can be spent on each piece. For initial preparation the singers are helped to hear their notes by the rehearsal pianist, but there is not much time to repeat the individual parts. Therefore, it is important to be able to 'sight read' new and typically challenging music both quickly and accurately. My inborn 'perfect pitch' might theoretically give me an advantage in sight reading, but I found the other singers were equally capable.

During rehearsals Philip provides instructions beyond those printed in the music, including differences in dynamics, tempo, and where to breathe. That's too much to remember, so singers have to be ready with a pencil (no ink, please!) to mark the music with these directions.

Especially in the more difficult music, certain parts will need extra rehearsal. Philip often hears errors and stops to devote additional attention to these areas. Additionally, chorus members may identify other passages and ask for additional instruction where they recognize insecurity, errors in finding the correct pitch, or pronunciation of the text.

To be well prepared for each rehearsal and be on track to learn fully each piece prior to the performance, most singers, even those with the best sight-reading skills, need to practice the music at home between rehearsals. They might consult previous recordings, or in the case of premieres, they might be provided with a computerized midi track: both resources make the at-home rehearsing more productive.

Look for more from Deane in the next issue of VoiceMail where he addresses how the Chorus tackles singing in a foreign language, phrasing and rhythm, enunciation, and what the conductor brings out in his choristers.

Innovative Speaker Series

The anticipated 65th season took on a new look due to constraints of the relentless pandemic leading Artistic Director Philip Barnes to create the first Chamber Chorus Speaker Series. The series will highlight the unique role of the Chamber Chorus in St. Louis and the wider artistic community. Archival concert recordings will replace live music until it is safe to attend performances.

Philip will host each of the six sessions on the original concert dates with invited experts and special guests. Board president Dick Brickson will join Philip to lead off the series by delving into the history of the Chorus and its six decades of music.

New commissions are a regular part of the SLCC repertoire. Philip has been an advocate for women composers since he assumed the role of artistic director. Laura Frank will co-host a conversation with Philip and several women composers, including two former

composers-in-residence. Christmas commissions are audience favorites, and assistant conductor Andy Jensen will help Philip celebrate the many carols written for us over the years.

There have been five composers-in-residence since Philip began the program. Assistant conductor Orin Johnson and Philip will discuss this special role with Mårten Jansson from Sweden, our current composer-in-residence. Another expert well known to our audience is historian Esley Hamilton who will discuss with Philip how architecture and choice of venue can influence the repertoire.

Former assistant conductor Mary Chapman and other choir members will conclude the series as they accompany Philip to regale us with tales of unexpected happenings during their tenure!

NOTEWORTHY NOTES

RAVE REVIEWS OF NEW CD!

During the pandemic, when we're starved of live singing, some fresh crumbs of comfort have become available in the shape of our latest CD on the Regent label. *St. Louis Premieres* is a collection of recent commissions for the choir, and the singers give elegant and committed performances of these appealing works. But don't take just our word for it: here is some of the praise the recording has already earned:

FROM THE WORLD'S LEADING REVIEW MAGAZINE, GRAMOPHONE:

[The SLCC] stands out for many reasons, among them a mellifluous approach to ensemble-singing that benefits everything their collective voices touch. The group deserves a special round of applause for its devotion to expanding the choral repertoire. Each of the 11 works performed here is a recent commission written specifically for the gifts director Philip Barnes and his colleagues have honed for decades, ... and they share musical immediacy, warmth and clarity of texture. Lifting and soaring phrases pervade Ērik Ešēnvalds's luminous *On Friendship*, as they do his affectionate *In the bleak midwinter*. On a particularly spirited set of notes is Robert Walker's *The Ale Songbook*, replete with bagpipe drones, cautionary sentiments and whimsical activity via verses by Poe, Burns and friends. The four beautifully compact songs that comprise Melissa Dunphy's Suite Remembrance take splendid advantage of the ensemble's exceptional flexibility and cohesion.

FROM THE REVIEW WEBSITE, www.classicalmusicsentinel.com:

The two selections by the Latvian composer Ēriks Ešēnvalds alone are worth the price of admission. In fact all of the songs on this CD make for fine additions to the choral music catalogue, and all showcase this choir's rich blend, dynamic range and ability to innovate, all captured in a realistically ambient audio recording.

FROM THE NATIONAL JOURNAL, AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE:

This chorus is larger than most chamber ensembles, but there's an intimacy and connectedness to their sound that any smaller choir would be tickled to have. The singers are at work in repertoire they themselves have commissioned, so the good news is that they perform everything with proprietary flair. There are nice entries here ...that justify interest from choral aficionados looking for new repertoire. Both Ešēnvalds entries are worth getting to know, especially the lovely take on *Bleak Midwinter*. I like the gentle rhythms in Jonathan Dove's *Kerry Carol* and admire Melissa Dunphy's songs that marry biblical and poetic texts with dances fast and slow. Her *If I Can Stop One Heart from Breaking* (Emily Dickinson) is the most affecting 4 minutes of the program. I also like the two folk arrangements and Robert Walker's affectionately poetic salute to beer. Texts, notes, and good engineering come with the package.

Downloads of all seven SLCC recordings by Regent Records are now available, so take advantage of this online option in the temporary absence of live performances.

Philip Barnes

For more information about concerts, tickets or auditions:

PO Box 11558, Clayton, MO 63105
(636) 458-4343

Graphic Designer, Ali Ruzicka

Advance Ticket Purchases:

Buy tickets online at our website
www.chamberchorus.org

or contact Katie Sandquist,
SLCC Executive Director
(636) 458-4343

For questions, comments or to submit ideas/articles for VoiceMail newsletter:

Gill Waltman, Editor
(314) 941-4455
gillian.waltman@gmail.com