

NOTEWORTHY NOTES

ST. LOUIS PREMIERES CD IN PRODUCTION

Our recording project embarked on last February is finally coming to completion. Our new CD, *St. Louis Premieres*, is a compilation of works commissioned for us in recent seasons, and features (among others) music by three of our previous Composers-in-Residence, **Melissa Dunphy**, **Clare Maclean**, and **Sasha Johnson Manning**. Regent Records are completing the edits sent to them by Philip and he has made a recommendation for the cover artwork. The scheduled release is mid-March.

SLCC PAST COMMISSION TO BE PERFORMED IN TEXAS

The Grammy-winning chamber choir *Conspire*, directed by **Craig Hella Johnson**, has announced that it will open its February 23 concert in Austin with **Eriks Esenvalds' On Friendship**, which we commissioned for our September 2018 concert. It is included on our forthcoming CD.

MORNINGSTAR ACCEPTS DUNPHY RECORDING

The publisher E.C. Schirmer/MorningStar has accepted **Melissa Dunphy's** *Waves of Gallipoli* for publication. They have requested from SLCC the use of the live concert recording of our commissioned piece performed in October 2019 to promote the new release. It also would be excellent recognition for both Dunphy and the SLCC. This could include streaming for music agents all over the world and being publicized on a promotional CD and website.

BARNES 'DARES' TO ENTERTAIN

Those of you who have been to many Chamber Chorus concerts will be familiar with the constant presentation of unique ideas, eclectic new and old compositions, and ever-changing venues chosen by **Artistic Director Philip Barnes** to keep the singers and this audience interested and entertained. Those new to the performances may be mystified! This is not just from concert to concert, but with themes for entire seasons. How does he do this so imaginatively, you may ask, and where does he get these creative ideas? It may surprise you to know that the topic for the November "The Year of the Pig" concert originated from a couple of dares!

A decade ago, Philip found a bizarre piece by the respected composer **Mátyás Seiber** written about a conversation between two pork chops! SLCC bass **Dick Diette** casually bet Philip that he couldn't construct an entire concert around that! Former composer-in-residence **Sasha Johnson Manning** loves the distinctive sound of the Chorus so much that she admitted that she was willing to write anything for us. (She had already composed a piece for us honoring beer!) Philip dared her to write about pork – and she accepted. Her composition explained how the Chinese discovered the delights of braised pork and was amazing! Watch out for future developments from the maestro – it is always a treat!

DINING AFTER THE CONCERT

Following today's performance please join us for refreshment at The West End Grill, located just a few blocks east, at 354 N. Boyle Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63108. For a reservation, call the pub in the Intermission: (314) 531-4607.

Identify yourself as a Chamber Chorus concertgoer, and the West End Grill will kindly donate a percentage of your check to the choir.



VOICEMAIL

WORLD PREMIERE OF BINGHAM COMMISSION



Judith Bingham, OBE.

The February concert of the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus will feature the world premiere of the **Judith Bingham** commission for **Sarah Bryan Miller**, classical music critic for the St. Louis Post Dispatch. This masterpiece was commissioned by a consortium and was first performed in a private setting on September 11 when the consortium gathered with Bryan to hear the complete version for the first time.

Judith conceived her new piece (Psalm 121, I Lift Up Mine Eyes to the Hills) as performable in several permutations, from SATB + keyboard at its simplest, to double choir + piano + organ at its most elaborate. Each successive layer of voices and/or instruments adds texture but doesn't alter Judith's essential vision. The February 16 concert at Second Presbyterian Church in the Central West End will be the first public performance of the full version of the piece at its most expansive scoring. The Chorus will be joined by additional performers **Lansin Lim Kimler** (piano) and **David Sinden** (organ)

Artistic Director **Philip Barnes** and Sarah Bryan Miller were interviewed on Tuesday February 11 during *St. Louis on the Air* (90.7 KWMU). They discussed the choral piece by Bingham commissioned in her honor. Bryan is well known for her tireless work promoting musicians and music organizations in St. Louis and was featured in an article by Barnes recently published in *St. Louis Magazine*. He quotes Bingham as saying "Composers don't often become friends with critics, but over the years I've come to really appreciate Bryan's knowledge of music, her never-failing curiosity in the arts, and her wonderfully dry sense of humor."

If you missed the live interview last Friday, you can still listen to it on the KWMU website. You can also read more about Bryan and her endeavors in the *St. Louis Magazine* article.

IN THIS ISSUE

Message from the President

Meet the Singers
Angela Hall
Orin Johnson

Concert Review by
Sarah Bryan Miller

Noteworthy Notes

THE
SAINT LOUIS
CHAMBER
CHORUS



You might be interested to know that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has now formally recognized what we in St. Louis have known for many years, that Judith Bingham is one of today's most original and inspired composers. In the New Year's Honors List, Judith was awarded the Order of the British Empire for her services to choral music.

For more information about concerts, tickets or auditions:

PO Box 11558, Clayton, MO 63105
(636) 458-4343
www.chamberchorus.org
Graphic Designer, Ali Ruzicka

Advance Ticket Purchases:

Buy tickets online at our website
www.chamberchorus.org
or contact Laura Frank,
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

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome to our first concert of 2020 in which we bring light to the winter's darkness through pieces that explore the interplay of light and music.

I want to draw your attention to the final piece in today's concert. Composed in 1973, "...a riveder le stelle", is a setting from Dante's "Divine Comedy". The last verse of *Inferno 34* reads "e quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle" (we emerged to see - once again - the stars.) The music captures Dante completing his journey through the realm of evil and quickly rising to the stars. In order to create the desired emotions and images for this work, composer **Ingvar Lindholm** required two complete SATB choirs with 32 separate parts.

As you listen, I suspect you will agree that our Chorus is one of the few choruses (in St. Louis or elsewhere) that would, or even could attempt this utterly virtuoso piece,

much less successfully perform it. It is complicated and requires extreme precision and very accomplished singers. Many things go into making a superior choir, but sometimes it is just a matter of what and how they sing. We performed this piece in our 1993-4 season, recording it for our CD "Choral Masterpieces" (available for purchase today!). Although you may not leave today whistling the tune from this piece, I am sure that you will remember the emotion and feeling that the Chorus created for you. We hope you enjoy it!

Dick Brickson

MEET THE SINGERS - ANGELA HALL



Angela was born in Charlotte, NC, moving to Missouri when she was 15. Her vocal journey began then, after joining the Saint Charles County Home Educators Choir under the direction of **Christiana Horn**. During her first semester singing with the group - a mixed choir of about 80 voices - they sang **John Rutter's** Requiem. Angela says, "What a piece! My young ears had never heard music of such beautiful complexity. And as for the actual

experience of singing with a choir - being just a part of something so much bigger and grander than myself - well, that changed me for good. After that semester, I knew I wanted to be making music for the rest of my life."

Angela enrolled at Lindenwood University when she was 17, studying music and math. She sang with every ensemble possible while at school, and was accepted into LU's premiere vocal ensemble, *Voices Only*, as a first-semester freshman. This is where she got her first taste of a *cappella* music. She sang with that group throughout her undergraduate years even acting as student director for two full years.

Starting college with the notion of one day becoming a choir director, Angela's first music theory class changed all that. She says "Our professor, **Dr. David Wallis**, was just phenomenal, and I quickly caught his passion for the subject. I adored learning how music works and found that the subject combined my love of math and music into a single entity in a way that really spoke to me." After graduating from Lindenwood she decided to pursue a master's in Music Theory at Washington University.

Angela recalls those couple of years as some of the most difficult of her life, practically living in the library. For her master's thesis she analyzed the complete *a cappella* works of **Eric Whitacre**, in an effort to understand what made his music so appealing to her ear. Along the way she developed a whole new system of analyzing cluster chords, or what she called "added tone sonorities". She never published this, but over 12,000 people found the topic interesting enough to read her thesis online!

After grad school she joined the *Saint Louis Harmony Chorus*, an award-winning women's barbershop chorus. Angela had been an avid barbershop fan for years, and she performed with that chorus in two national competitions and began singing and competing with quartets as well. Her first quartet, *Executive Sweets*, won the novice quartet award in 2013; her second quartet, *Vocal Crush*, won first place in an area contest in 2016 ... and her current quartet, *Force of Nature*, is set to make its debut on the contest stage this coming June.

Even with all the barber-shopping, she was still missing something from her musical life. Angela wanted to sing more serious music, like the Rutter that she was drawn to in high school, or the Whitacre she'd loved so much during college years. "Enter the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus, which has ended up being the perfect fit for me. The sight reading, the musicianship, the eclectic mix of pieces, and the challenge and learning opportunity they present. I love it! And I feel at last that my musical life is complete."

Aside from singing in the Chorus and her quartet, Angela also teaches private piano and voice lessons out of The Music Hall, her home studio. She used to maintain 40-50 students regularly but has cut back her hours to devote herself to the important job of motherhood! Her daughter Lorelei will be one next month. "It's been a real adventure so far, and I can hardly wait to see where the toddler years take us."

MEET THE SINGERS - ORIN JOHNSON



Orin Johnson was born in Tyler, Minnesota, and began organ (and eventually piano) lessons in first grade. He began playing in church in fifth grade, and later was active in high school choirs and bands (trombone).

He attended Harvard University, graduating with a BA in a joint concentration of Music and Folklore & Mythology. He sang in the renowned Harvard Glee Club (directed at the time by **Jameson Marvin**), sang with, and

directed for the Dunster House Opera Society, and also the Catholic Student Choir at St. Paul Catholic Church. During this time his love of sacred music and choral music took hold and set him on lifelong paths which continue to the present.

Immediately after Harvard, he earned his first MA, in Music (with choral direction emphasis) from Radford University, under **David Otis Castonguay**. Immediately after, he moved to the St. Louis area (in 1998) for the Music and Liturgy position at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, a post he held for 14 years. While at that post, he quickly auditioned for, and was accepted into the SLCC as a Bass II (probably because he sang some Finzi at the audition); six years later he was invited to become an Assistant Director.

Joining the SLCC all those years ago was a fortuitous and felicitous occasion, Orin says. "Based on the recommendation of singer **Rhonda Collins**, of the SLCC and the Shrine, I auditioned not really knowing what to expect, or even the repertoire or mission of the Chorus. I immediately fell in love with the caliber of the group, the pace of practices and concerts, even Philip's sense of humor and rehearsal style." The membership welcomed him and has always made him feel comfortable and at home.

Concert Review by Sarah Bryan Miller

The header for this recent review of our December concert was "Stellar Singing from the St. Louis Chamber Chorus in "Christmas Down Under". Excerpted from her remarks, SBM wrote, "Most musical organizations have a template for their holiday concerts..... the big centerpiece composition, the carol singalong and so forth." She comments that "Artistic Director Philip Barnes does things a little differently: He focuses on Christmas music from a different country or region each year. [This year's] theme was Christmas Down Under, giving the holiday an Australian accent and Christmas works from composers native to the Antipodes."

In 2004, Orin married **Erin Hammond**, who occasionally ushers at concerts and is often seen, pen in hand, taking notes about the pieces being performed and sometimes being accused of being a critic. Truth be told, Orin says, she is, but a kind one!! Orin and Erin commissioned "That I Did Always Love" from **Clare Maclean** for the SLCC for their 10th anniversary.

Orin has gained some attention as a composer of sacred music for the Catholic Church, having several pieces now in print with OCP, GIA, WLP and others. Due to his role accompanying services at Shaare Emeth (since 2005), he also has a piece of music published by TMP, for the Reform Judaism movement.

In 2008, Orin earned his second MA, in Theology, from Aquinas Institute of Theology here in St. Louis, where Erin has also studied and still works as registrar and in development.

In 2012, Orin left the Shrine to take the Director of Music Ministries post at Sts. Joachim and Ann Catholic Church in St. Charles, the location of Concert V in April this year. He oversees a large and varied group of choristers, instrumentalists, cantors, and more. He also began working at Chaminade College Prep as director of the liturgical musicians and as their music director for drama.

Orin has been active for over two decades in *Youth Sing Praise*, a summer camp for teens during which a full musical is produced, rehearsed, and performed in a week's time. He and friend **Bradley J. Behrmann** cowrote the show *Just Pretend* for the 2015 camp, which is being performed again this June.

Orin concludes, "It is making music and writing music that is a real outlet for me, a chance to express myself in what I feel is a deep and unique way; a chance to express thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that words and actions might not be able to do as well."

She describes the venue as "that West County architectural meringue, St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church. Better known as the St. Louis Abbey, the nave has poor sight lines, but more than makes up for it with a wonderful acoustic."

Bryan concludes her review saying "The choir boasts an excellent blend and produced some fine soloists. Once again the St. Louis Chamber Chorus claimed its title as the region's finest *a cappella* ensemble."