



# VOICEMAIL

February 2019

## Mårten Jansson – New Composer-in-Residence

The Chamber Chorus is delighted to welcome Swedish composer **Mårten Jansson** for a three-year term as its new Composer-in-Residence. He follows an illustrious group of composers who have held this role, including **Sasha Johnson Manning**, **Clare Maclean**, **Yakov Gubanov**, and **Melissa Dunphy**.



Mårten Jansson

Following the warm reception given to two of his earlier pieces, the Chamber Chorus commissioned from Mårten *Tonight I Dance Alone*, to open its 62nd season. Chorus lovers were fortunate to hear the world premiere of this composition arranged to a moving poem by **Tony Sylvestri**. Our singers and audience members met them when Mårten came to St. Louis from Sweden and Tony traveled from Topeka, Kansas for the performance. This piece may be heard on our website.

Born in Uppsala in 1965, Mårten continues to live there with his family. A graduate of the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, he spent many years working with *Carmen*, a prominent women's choir. He attributes much of his early success to this experience of writing for female voices. He still teaches, combining this with his conducting and composing career. He has presented at choral symposia throughout Europe, most recently in Germany and Latvia. In 2012 Mårten was elected to the Society of Swedish Composers around the time that he began writing for mixed voices. His early efforts attracted the attention and then support of distinguished publisher Bärenreiter Edition which promotes his works worldwide, and for whom he now writes exclusively.

Mårten states that his music is his own and that he has never tried to be original. This, from a composer who is so often original in the way he treats familiar texts, or how he conveys universal emotions! He takes inspiration from a variety of sources, including his faith and family. As Mårten gains even greater popularity in North America, we look forward to collaborating with him on several works as a gift not only to St. Louis, but also to the wider musical community. His new composition for the Chorus can be heard at the May concert. Collaborating again with Tony Sylvestri, the piece is written for this season's *States of Being* theme on *HOPE*.

Gill Waltman

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### The Saint Louis Chamber Chorus

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# Message from the President

by Dick Brickson

At the beginning of each year, we never know what new and exciting opportunities the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus will enjoy. Musicians, producers and music professionals from around the world know the Chorus. For example, in recent years, **Barry Manilow** asked the Chorus to join his live show here in St. Louis. Film producer **Trevor Jones** asked the Chorus to sing for the sound tracks of two of his movies. Leading choral music reviewers and publications have given wonderful reviews to the Chorus's live music and to its recordings.

This January, musicians and music professionals from around the world gathered at the Kremlin in Moscow for one of the largest conferences on sacred music in the world, the Readings Conference of the Russian Orthodox Church. The organizers and former SLCC composer-in-residence **Yakov Gubanov** invited **Philip Barnes** to speak at the conference. This was a great opportunity for Philip to introduce the Chorus to a learned and expert audience, and for these people to meet Philip in person, to hear him speak and to hear the Chorus's music.

Philip's presentation focused on the intersections of cultures and traditions in the arts. As a prime example, he discussed Gubanov's carol *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*, a German text set to music by a Russian composer, interpreted by a British conductor and performed by American singers. He played our recording of the piece for the conference audience. We were delighted that Philip had this unique opportunity and was able to take advantage of it and to extend the reach of the Chorus to this influential audience in Moscow.

## Meet the Singers — Holley Sherwood

Born in southern California but raised in St. Louis, **Holley** had a natural musical aptitude from a young age. Her mother taught her to play piano when she was five years old and quickly engaged a trained piano teacher. So, right after learning to read letters, Holley learned to read musical notes. In fact, she doesn't remember a time when she couldn't read music! She progressed quickly in piano under the instruction of **Marlita Weiss** and soon was competing locally in St. Louis and internationally via the World Piano Competition held in Cincinnati. Holley attended Interlochen Arts Academy as a piano student for two summers. She was invited back the second summer without an audition.



Holley Sherwood

The first time her mother really heard Holley sing around age 7, she was amazed and immediately called **Christine Brewer**, a member of the family church choir. Ms. Brewer told her Holley should take violin lessons and join the church children's choir when she was old enough. Holley took violin for a few years then switched to clarinet and flute, teaching herself to play the latter. Around age 11, she started singing with the mixed child and adult choir at her church.

After a misguided stint playing clarinet in 8th grade band and one semester in 9th grade at Mary Institute Country Day School, Holley realized the error of her ways and joined the choir. Throughout high school, she studied voice with **Nance St. James** and continued competing in piano competitions. Holley attended the National High School Music Institute at Northwestern University between her junior and senior years of high school, which encouraged her to pursue a music degree in college. However, Holley was also very aca-

demically inclined. With the encouragement of her parents, she searched for a college where she could obtain a dual degree in math and music in four years. She eventually settled on Furman University with scholarships to study piano, voice, and mathematics. Ultimately, Holley obtained a Bachelor of Music in Music Theory after studying piano, voice, organ, choral conducting, and composition. Holley went on multiple tours during college with the Furman Singers around the USA, one in Europe, and one as part of the Boston Pops Christmas Touring Ensemble. She loved every minute of being a part of a choir!

After college, Holley worked many jobs (including six at one time!) before settling down as an actuarial analyst working for her mother's firm. Holley was one of Winter Opera St. Louis' first Resident Artists in 2014-2015, performing in almost all productions including the role of Star in *The Wise Women*. Currently she is a full member of the St. Louis Chamber Chorus, and the full-time soloist at the First Church of Christ, Scientist on Westminster Place. Holley was the Soprano II Section Leader of St. Peter's Episcopal Church for eight years. For two years Holley was a Principal Singer and soloist with Masterworks Chorale, and also sang with the St. Louis Symphony Chorus. She occasionally performs in local musical theater productions for fun.

In case you thought she wasn't busy enough, Holley also typesets pieces for the SLCC, runs supertitles for Winter Opera St. Louis, and occasionally sings in Winter Opera St. Louis productions. When not singing, she most likely can be found studying for her next actuarial exam!

## Meet the Singers — Nathan Brown

**Nathan** grew up in Trenton, Illinois with his parents, an older sister and younger brother. His earliest musical memory is singing along to the CDs his mother played while she cleaned. He would cry until she put some sheet music in front of him so he could “read along.” Three-year-olds can be very stubborn! His whole family is very musical. His mother and aunt are both singers and took lessons from **Christine Brewer** in high school. One cousin is a band director, another performs at Disney, an uncle directed the church choir, and his maternal grandparents both marched in local drum corps in high school.



Nathan Brown

Throughout grade school, Nathan absorbed himself in music. He joined choir and band in 5th grade, sang a summer camp with the Masterworks Chorale in Edwardsville, sang in church regularly, and auditioned for *American Idol* once or twice. “Because why not?” After high school, he pursued a Bachelor in Music Education at Murray State University. He was involved with many musical groups including Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, Racer Marching Band, EQ Blu (Murray’s *a cappella* group), and a student-led chamber choir. His professors encouraged him to pursue composition. He wrote numerous arrangements and three different song cycles for friends’ recitals.

As a solo performer in college, Nathan had many roles in operas, plays, and competed regularly while remaining dedicated to his pursuits as an educator. He was a featured tenor soloist for Handel’s *Messiah* as well as for *Bach Cantata 4*. In addition to his singing career, Nathan is an award-winning *a cappella* arranger and has composed many original pieces and song cycles

for voice and piano. In December 2017, Nathan graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Music Education. He subbed in choir and math for a semester at a high school in Kentucky, before moving to St. Louis with his cat Lucy unhappily in tow, to start his teaching career as a part-time choral director at Belleville West High School.

A college friend suggested that he audition for the Chorus. As a 23-year-old, Nathan wasn’t expecting to make it into a group of that caliber, so to be offered a full-time position as a tenor was a dream come true. He is the youngest member to be accepted full-time into the Chorus. **Philip** warned him that it would be almost like a graduate course in choral repertoire. “He wasn’t joking! I’ve been exposed to so many new composers and pieces that I might never have found without this group, especially wonderful female composers. I also admire his passion for supporting living composers through commissions and premiering works regularly.”

Nathan’s hobbies include playing cards and board games, swimming for leisure, and listening to NPR podcasts. He loves teaching choir and solo singing, but his passion is making great music with other talented artists. He loves the challenge that the pieces bring for him as a young singer. “I’m constantly improving my music reading skills, my musicianship, and my vocal technique every rehearsal. Every week I’m blown away by the experienced singers around me. Monday night rehearsal is usually my favorite time of the entire week. For someone to say three hours of singing is their favorite part of the week, it has to be pretty good!”

## Tap Room Concert – Cheer (or Cheers?)

The setting for the November concert was upstairs at the Schlafly Tap Room with an open bar! (Quoted are excerpts from the SLPD review by **Sarah Bryan Miller**.) “A concert of choral music dedicated to the subject of drinking and performed at a bar might sound, well, frothy. But Concert II, *Cheer*, on Sunday afternoon from the St. Louis Chamber Chorus, mixed its moments of hilarity with some melancholy and one decidedly profound work, for a range of emotions—and music—that challenged the listener.”

The concert’s world premiere followed Paul Hindemith’s gloomy *Trink aus!* **Sasha Johnson Manning’s** *It Is Not for Kings, Lemuel*, commissioned by **Dan Hanson** and **Kathy Miller**, is a “profound and beautiful work, may be her best yet. Apropos for our times, it brought tears to the eyes and was beautifully sung.”

After a quick happy birthday tribute to **Philip**, we heard **Robert Walker’s** five-part *The Ale Songbook*, an SLCC commission from 2012 which included top favorite **Robert Burns’** *Gude Ale Keeps the Heart Aboon*, “featuring a nasal semichorus imitating bagpipe drones. The encore was *Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes*, deftly arranged by St. Louisan **Jon Garrett**.”

# Noteworthy Notes

## A Review Worth Waiting For!

Despite the fact it was released in 2016, a lengthy review of *Saint Louis Firsts* only just appeared in the November 2018 issue of *Choral Journal* by music critic **Alan Denney** (quoted here).

“The name **Philip Barnes** is known worldwide in choral circles. Educated at Manchester Grammar School, the University of Manchester, Bristol University, and King’s College in London, Barnes’s extensive experience is admirable. Since 1989, he has been the conductor of the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus, embracing literature for unaccompanied choir, and has ensured that St. Louis audiences have regular access to the masterpieces of the repertoire, from the Renaissance to present-day compositions. Barnes has led the choir in the performance of more than 1250 works performed in the original language and to the highest musical standards.”

Saint Louis Chamber Chorus’s latest recording, *Saint Louis Firsts*, contains eleven works—all by living composers (at the time of the recording). Nine are newly commissioned works never before recorded.

Denney refers to the dissonant and gripping work of **Trevor Jones’s Psalm 23** “demanding of both the performer and listener.” Australian composer **Clare Maclean’s Slow Gold** for double choir “possesses a definite hymn-like quality that strongly predominates while allowing contemporary flexibility in both meter and interpretation.” He comments that “**Bob Chilcott’s** passionate *Before the Ice* is a commissioned work that definitely pushes the Chamber Chorus to its dynamic extremes.” He describes the American composer **Howard Helvey’s An Evening Song** using text of Civil War poet Sidney Lanier in this lush, commissioned work. “**Sasha Johnson Manning’s Ode to Love** is a stunning work performed exquisitely by

the chorus. Definitely dark and challenging, the work’s ultimate climax on the word ‘love’ is breathtaking. The chorus relishes the resolution and performs it sublimely.”

“The crowning compositions on this recording are **Judith Bingham’s Solomon and Love**—a cantata in four movements—and *Aquileia*. Bingham’s writing for voices is extraordinarily and masterfully displayed. This is present-day composing at its best.”

“The recording’s final work is the stunning *Le Dernier Voyage* by **Sydney Guillaume**. Commissioned by the chorus in 2012, Guillaume’s own father wrote the text for this beautiful composition, which describes life as a journey at sea. This is a work definitely worth consideration for performance. Included in the recording are also several additional commissions and works, such as *A Contemplation Upon Flowers* by **Richard Rodney Bennett**, the jubilant and buoyant *Iam Ver Egelidos* by **Ugis Praulins**, and *Good Day, Sir Christmas!* by British composer **Francis Pott**. All are performed with utmost delicacy and verve.”



Philip Barnes, Sasha Johnson Manning, Dan Hanson, and Kathy Miller at the Schlafly Tap Room concert

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