



VOICEMAIL



ADVENT TO CHRISTMAS

The third concert in this season's theme of progressions was held on Dec 18 at Union Avenue Christian Church. The theme *Advent to Christmas* provided a well-rounded repertoire of both familiar and less well-known music during this festive and reflective season providing this audience with an in-depth interpretation of the Christmas message.

In the first half, homage was paid to Ralph Vaughan Williams – a prolific British composer the 150th anniversary of whose birth was being celebrated by choirs around the world, including the Chamber Chorus. Aside from his copious catalog of choral work, one important achievement recognized at Christmas is the anthology of carols he compiled in 1928 - *The English Book of Carols*. Three of his arrangements of traditional English carols from the anthology were performed. These were interspersed between the remaining pieces in the first half which included a composition by Charles Collins, a former SLCC singer, and three SLCC commissions by Ivan Moody, Wolfram Buchenberg, and Sasha Johnson Manning.

The entire second half of the concert was devoted to one sacred piece of music by German composer Hugo Distler written before World War II but under rising Nazi aggression. *Die Weihnachtsgeschichte* tells the story of Christ's birth sung to traditional biblical passages. Between these passages were sung variations of the familiar and melodic *There is a Rose Blooming*. The cantata featured choruses devoted to single and double choirs with many solo parts (Mary, the Angel, Herod) and was narrated by the Evangelist. This solo effort required a commanding deep bass voice and much stamina, both admirably provided by Chris Boemler.

Music critic George Yeh wrote that “Distler’s *Christmas Story* sinks or swims based on the Evangelist, who has by far the most work of the solo singers.” And added that fortunately, Christopher Boemler was well up to the job. This extended work was previously performed fifteen years ago by the Chorus in the 52nd season, the only time this has occurred in the St. Louis area until now, although individual movements are sometimes performed. Yeh gave credit to the SLCC for giving St. Louis concertgoers a (second) rare chance to hear the work live.

Gill Waltman

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THE
SAINT LOUIS
CHAMBER
CHORUS



Chorus members in casual mode during a rehearsal.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome to the Spring Half of our 2022-2023 Season!

Each year, we try to enrich your lives with new music, new experiences and new talent. At this first concert of the Spring, we are very excited to introduce you to **Kerensa Briggs**, our newest Composer-in-Residence. The February concert will not only feature her music – it will feature Kerensa in person! We hope you take this opportunity to say hello to her and to welcome her warmly to St. Louis.

Kerensa's *Height in Depth* suite, her first commission for the Chorus, also has another special connection with St. Louis. The estate of **Sarah Bryan Miller**, the well-respected, long-time music critic for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, commissioned this splendid work.

Kerensa joins our collection of extraordinarily talented composers and former composers-in-residence from around the world. Based on her background, she clearly belongs in this group. Described as

'poignant, ambivalent, quietly devastating music' in the New York Times, she is an award-winning composer specializing in choral music. Her music has been performed internationally at venues including St. Paul's Cathedral and the Sistine Chapel and is regularly broadcast internationally by ensembles such as The Tallis Scholars and the BBC Singers. Kerensa won the National Centre for Early Music Young Composers Award 2014 and is a member of the 'Illuminate' women's music project. Her love of choral music emanates from her background, singing in choirs including King's College, London where she held a Choral Scholarship and undertook an MMus in Composition.

We are delighted that Kerensa will be here in person. Please join us immediately after the concert at a free reception in the church hosted by SLCC.

Dick Brickson

SHANNON MCFARLAND



When Shannon was a young child, her mother noted that she had an ear for music. Her first musical memory was crying to Phil Collins "You'll Be in My Heart" from the Tarzan soundtrack. She says that it was clear from early on that music would play a huge part in her life.

In elementary school, Shannon was blessed with a wonderful music teacher, **Donna Buehne**, who not only instilled in her an excitement for music but gave her the tools to be successful later in life. Shannon joined band in middle school with teachers who pushed boundaries and helped to foster her excitement and curiosity for new instruments. Her mother took her every summer to rent whichever new instrument she was bound and determined to learn next, and then put up with the sounds of a beginner player practicing in the basement.

Choir became her new obsession in school, and again she was blessed by music teachers who poured so much into her music education. Demonstrating this passion in high school choir, her teachers encouraged her to pursue music in college, even helping her to prepare audition pieces. With the strong influence provided by her music teachers, she decided to study music education at Missouri State University. Here Shannon sang as a part of the MSU Chorale and traveled all over the USA and abroad. "I sang in small villages in China, stayed with choir singers in Norway, and got to sing with my best friends every day. This is when I truly fell in love with choral singing and the friendships that come with

it. I am so glad that now I get to spend my life sharing that with others through performance and teaching!"

When Covid began in March of 2020, like many others, Shannon's life was completely halted. Her senior recital, student teaching, and graduation were all postponed, canceled, or turned virtual. "My soul ached to sing with others again after the abrupt end to singing!" Moving back to St. Louis to be close to family throughout the pandemic, Shannon searched out singing opportunities in the summer of 2021. Finding the Chamber Chorus was a breath of fresh air that she needed after a year of isolation. "Being in choir with **Phillip Barnes** has been so much fun! His amusing information nuggets, stories, and historical tangents make rehearsals enjoyable and always leave me with a bit more context and knowledge than I started out with."

Along with singing in the chorus, Shannon also sings with the No Name Chorale in Belleville, Ill., and she is the sixth-grade general music and choir teacher at Lift for Life Academy in Soulard. Thanks to the chamber chorus, she has met dozens of other music teachers in the area and has been introduced to a new community of like-minded people that she loves to spend time with at Monday evening rehearsals!

When not singing and teaching, Shannon loves to spend her weekends camping, traveling, running, or riding her bike. She is very close to her family, and there is always a family member in the audience at her concerts. "My mom has been my biggest cheerleader since I was little! She is at the finish line of races, in the crowd for graduations, and always standing at the end of my concerts!"

Gill Waltman



Jacob has been around music his whole life having a mother who is a music teacher and father who is an orchestral violinist. Jacob learned to sing in a choral setting as a member of the Tulsa Boy Singers in Tulsa, Okla., from ages 8 to 18 under the direction of **Casey**

Cantwell (whom some may know from the American Guild of Organists). Although Jacob loves choral singing, he is also an instrumentalist. He plays drums and percussion professionally, and guitar as a serious hobby. He has a wide range of experiences, including “a middle school concert band, high school punk bands, college bar bands, some touring, some studio work, the whole deal!”

Aside from Casey Cantwell, who deserves the lion’s share of credit for Jacob’s musical upbringing, and **Jackie Saylor** (the assistant director/den mother of TBS), other big influences during his college years were **Z. Randall Stroope**, composer and head of the choral department at Oklahoma State University and **Christopher Haygood**, associate professor of choral music at OSU. Jacob was Haygood’s undergraduate assistant and men’s section leader in the jazz choir as well as the general admission university chorus, both of which were under his direction.

Jacob graduated from OSU with a Music Industry degree, with a focus in venue management. He moved to St. Louis in 2018 with Brienna, now his wife, when she started medical school at St. Louis University (they were married in 2020). He searched the internet for choral groups to join and SLCC was one of the first to pop up. At the time he couldn’t do Monday night rehearsals, so he joined the American Chamber Chorale with **Stephen Morton** (still a

member) but kept SLCC in the back of his mind. When Brienna started her medical residency in family medicine in Ann Arbor, Mich., Jacob decided looked for various musical pursuits to keep busy in her absence. **Philip Barnes** was on sabbatical when he auditioned, so they did not meet until the first rehearsal of this season.

Jacob currently works at Salem United Methodist Church as its Technical Director. The position is part audio engineer, part IT, and part repair tech. He worked his way up at Salem from choir member, to custodian, to production assistant, to his current position. Jacob is also a freelance recording/audio engineer for various venues around St. Louis.

“I like to consider myself a musician, not a sound engineer or tech guy, but that’s what all the tech guys say.” His various freelance audio engineer gigs don’t leave a lot of time for hobbies, but he says that’s the funny thing about having a ‘hobby’ as a job - you don’t mind as much when you spend all your waking life doing it.

When he is not staring at waveforms or making some sort of sound, Jacob prefers to be a homebody spending time with Brienna and four black cats (Razz, Tobi, Bisha, and Little Man – all plucked from the street.) Now they travel back and forth between St. Louis and Ann Arbor while Brienna completes her residency. As she took two of the cats with her for company, Jacob added two parakeets to the local pet roster – Mordecai and Rigby. (The cats are curious but not predatory - so far!) When he can find the time, Jacob consumes media and plays video games like any self-respecting 27-year-old but most of his hobbies come back to music. “Ask me about headphones, small electronic repair/modification, and/or luthier work.”

Gill Waltman

DRESS REHEARSALS WITH COMPOSERS

As we begin a new ‘residency’ with **Kerensa Briggs**, this is an opportune time to reflect on the different relationships we have experienced in the past, working with composers from around the globe. Though they have been varied, for each one coming here to work with us, putting finishing touches to their creation, has been an invigorating, if sometimes daunting, experience. Some so clearly know what they want, and how to get it, that at our dress rehearsal we are eager and sometimes anxious to show how well we’ve understood them. **Judith Bingham** comes to mind, because her music is always brilliantly conceived but can be challenging to sing; once she’s ‘in the room’ with us we have to be on our best behavior! Like Judith, **Sasha Johnson Manning** has visited us often, and this repeated exposure to our blend has affected how she writes for us. At dress rehearsals, she is pondering what we’re singing and how certain progressions work well for us; you see the fruits of that in a subsequent commission.

Chorus members love to perform new music, but they are especially appreciative of composers who seem to have crafted each voice part rather than simply creating an overall harmonic effect from the combined voices. This is noticeable with **Melissa Dunphy** whose pieces almost sing themselves – you can tell that she’s sung every line to make sure that it ‘works.’ Her high energy at a dress rehearsal fires us with enthusiasm, but there are rarely issues with the notes themselves.

And what will be Kerensa Briggs’ profile? Well, the early signs are promising, because it’s clear that she too applies her own experience as a chorister to create vocal lines that are both rewarding to sing, and which contribute so elegantly to a harmonic whole. Here’s to a new, beautiful friendship!

Philip Barnes

(See photos taken at a rehearsal on front and back pages.)

NOTEWORTHY NOTES

WATER TO WINE

The second concert of the season was held on Nov.13 when the Chamber Chorus gave its first-ever performance in the chapel of Ursuline Academy, a relatively intimate space. This is also the venue where Monday night rehearsals currently are held.

The concert's theme was *Water to Wine*, allowing **Philip Barnes** the opportunity to create a repertoire ranging from obvious biblical associations to more light-hearted and less reverent references, mostly to wine! The program was structured around the full mass setting of the *Vinum Bonum* motet for double choir by Renaissance composer Orlandus Lassus with each section of the mass interspersed with the other pieces in the repertoire.

After a rousing opening with the first section of the mass, the program continued with works by various composers with an emphasis on water, flowing into the remaining pieces celebrating wine – or drinking! Familiar pieces included *Down Among the Dead Men* by Ralph Vaughn Williams, *Trinklied* by Felix Mendelssohn, and *Which Is The Properest Day to Drink?* by Thomas Arne from the 1700s! The first half also provided an opportunity to see the SLCC's assistant conductors at work when **Orin Johnson** and **Caroline Ibnabdeljalil** took a turn at the podium and conducted four of the more amusing pieces.

The encore was former Chorus member **Jon Garrett's** arrangement of *Drink to me only with thine eyes* – always a favorite with this audience.

CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch no longer publishes reviews of classical music performances, which reflects poorly both on its journalism and upon the city it serves. Fortunately, the good folks at our region's community radio station, KDHX 88.1 have taken up the challenge, and the Chamber Chorus has been covered by a very erudite observer, **George Yeh**. His reviews are comprehensive, complimentary yet not without constructive criticism.

His reviews of the past two concerts, the November 13th performance at Ursuline Academy, and the December 18th concert at Union Avenue Christian Church, can be read in their entirety by following the link at the radio station. <https://kdhx.org/articles/classical>

Philip Barnes

MEET OUR NEW COMPOSER-IN-RESIDENCE AFTER THE CONCERT!

Please join us for a casual reception serving coffee, tea and cookies right after the concert at Third Baptist Church. You will have the opportunity to meet some of the singers, board members and other audience-goers, but you will also have the unique opportunity to meet **Kerensa Briggs** in person. She is our newest composer-in-residence who has traveled here from London for her first SLCC concert and more importantly, to hear the world premiere of her commissioned composition, *Height in Depth* suite, in a live performance for the first time.

When one of our composers-in-residence comes to visit, a busy program is arranged by the SLCC Board that usually includes a school visit to teach a master class, a radio interview, social interactions with some of the board members, attendance at the dress rehearsal with the singers (see article on page 3) and of course the culmination of their visit – to attend the entire concert on Sunday afternoon and hear the mastery of the Chamber Chorus, including its rendition of the composer's commissioned piece.

What makes this performance even more poignant is that the new work was commissioned by the estate of **Sarah Bryan Miller**, beloved music critic, well-known to this audience.

Join us for a chance to meet everyone, including Kerensa, at the reception after the concert. The last time we were able to host an event like this was way before the pandemic. We hope to offer more events like this in the future.



Monday Night Rehearsals

For more information about concerts, tickets or auditions:

PO Box 11558, Clayton, MO 63105
info@chamberchorus.org
(636) 458-4343

Graphic Designer, Ali Ruzicka

Subscription 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