

VOICEMAIL



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SAINT LOUIS CHAMBER CHORUS

A Consuming Fire



The opening concert of the 71st season with the theme of Choral Elements featuring Fire, was held on Sunday October 4 at Second Baptist Church in Richmond Heights. Its Scandinavian-style architecture results in a simple structure with a comfortable interior adorned with nine windows painted in enamel depicting the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes. Despite a smaller space than many venues, it has excellent sight lines with no obstructing pillars and a clean acoustic that allows polyphonic lines to remain distinct, a feature put to good use by **Philip Barnes'** choice of repertoire in this concert.

As Barnes has mentioned, selections for this concert, as one might expect from this choir, include neglected classics, an unfamiliar but superb woman composer, and a world premiere from one of today's finest writers of choral music. He was referring to the highlight of the concert— the world premiere of a new song cycle of Sara Teasdale poems set by a SLCC favorite, **Ēriks Ešenvalds**. This talented Latvian composer traveled from Riga for the occasion. (Read more on page 4.)

Another SLCC tradition is to sing each rendition in its intended language. The original text next to the English translation is provided in the program for the concert, allowing the listener to read and hear the words as they are being sung. (Not so much the Russian text!)

Throughout the concert were some marvelous early Renaissance pieces including the opening piece, *Dum Complerentur* by Francisco Guerrero, followed by *D'un feu secret je me sens consumer* by Michel Lambert, and *Sdegno la Fiamma Estinse* by the prolific composer Alessandro Scarlatti (an admitted Barnes favorite.)

The final two works in the first half were from the 19th century; *Drei Lieder* by Agnes Tyrell (the superb Anglo-Czech composer referred to above) providing the St. Louis premières of these three songs, and *Prometheus* (who stole fire from Zeus and gave it to man), the rousing piece by Russian composer Sergey Taneyev.

The second half began with the hauntingly beautiful song cycle, *Oh Day of Fire and Sun – a Teasdale Suite* by Ēriks Ešenvalds. This world première was commissioned for the SLCC by **Phillip and Randi Klasskin**, who happen to live on Teasdale Avenue!

Two more early Italian pieces followed; Carlo Gesualdo's *Hai Rotto e Sciolto e Spento,* and another Scarlatti piece, *Arsi Un Tempo*. Two more recent pieces ended the concert; *Entreat Me Not to Leave* by young American composer Dan Forrest, and a contemporary version of Guerrero's *Dum Complerentur* by Canadian composer Stephanie Martin.

George Yeh (SubStack music critic) commented that "virtually the entire program consisted of music new to the group's repertoire". Note also that the talented singers of this choir sang the mostly new repertoire in six different languages!

Gill Waltman

Message from the President

Welcome to today's performance.
The St. Louis Chamber Chorus seeks to "entertain, educate, and inspire" audiences through distinctive programs presented in some of St. Louis's finest public buildings. An important part of that mission is reaching out and engaging with communities throughout the region. We reach out in many ways each year. As always, we choose concert venues in new or different communities, partly to expose our music to new and different audiences. We offer student discounts on tickets to attract young audiences. We collaborate with high schools, colleges and universities to develop new music and to introduce ourselves to high school and college students.

Today's collaboration
Today's concert in the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis reflects that commitment. We are delighted to welcome 17 members of Lindbergh High School's Advanced Treble Choir. This all-girl choir began this year because Lindbergh had such a talented group of singers that it created a separate choir able to handle more challenging repertoire and opportunities. These students have worked very hard to learn the music, rehearsed separately, and joined us for several combined rehearsals this week. This collaboration gives them the opportunity to sing with the Chamber Chorus while allowing us to work with one of St. Louis's finest high school choirs.

Benefits of singing together
The collaboration benefits everyone involved. The high school singers gain experience performing with the Midwest's premier *a cappella* ensemble whose members span a wide range of ages, while Chamber Chorus singers have the pleasure of making music with these talented young performers. Parents, friends, family members, and the wider audience also have the opportunity to hear the combined choirs in the beautiful acoustic of this magnificent Catholic Basilica.

With our thanks
We extend our sincere thanks to **Laura Swearingen**, Head Director of Lindbergh's choirs, and **Brook Bisaillon**, Assistant Director, for their leadership, enthusiasm for bringing our ensembles together, and work in making this collaboration possible. Brook is a former Chamber Chorus singer and currently serves on our board of directors.

Dick Brickson

New Accompanist - Robert Valentine



Robert Valentine is excited to work with the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus this season after being recommended by **Joe Drexelius**, and with **Philip Barnes** being nice enough to give him a try. He has spent the last few years balancing being a Registered Nurse and his passion for music.

Robert began studying music at age 6 with piano lessons. Throughout his youth, he found a love for singing and decided that was going to be his career. He started college as a voice major, but quickly gravitated back to studying piano upon the realization that he can't act! However, he was able to fool a couple of directors into casting him in shows like *Red, Hot, and Cole*, *Godspell,* and *Company.* In high school, he played Aslan in *Narnia: The Musical* from which photographs and videos are being held by his family for future blackmail purposes. He graduated from Georgia College and State University in 2008 with a Bachelor's degree in Piano Performance.

After graduating, Robert relocated to Metro St. Louis and earned his master's degree in choral conducting and collaborative piano at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville. After completing his studies, Robert worked at Texas State University as a staff pianist.

Robert returned to the St. Louis area and spent the next few years as a freelance pianist working with Union Avenue Opera, Gateway Opera, SIUE, and Missouri Baptist University. He also was the director of choirs at Our Lord's Lutheran Church in Maryville, IL.

Robert has worked with the SIUE Suzuki program which gave him the opportunity to play throughout Europe (Austria, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia). Additionally, he sang in Ireland and England with Union Avenue Christian Church's Chancel Choir.

Eventually, he went back to school and graduated cum laude from SIUE with a BSN. His career as an RN began two weeks before the start of the Covid pandemic, so he says that to say he was thrown into the deep end is a bit of an understatement. Robert worked as a case manager in hospice for four years before transitioning to his current position in radiation oncology. He works at St. Elizabeth's Hospital where he takes on the role as a clinic nurse and heads the survivorship program as well as outreach events to educate the public on cancer prevention and early detection.

Robert has continued his love of singing not only as a collaborative pianist but also singing with the St. Louis Symphony Chorus and volunteering with the Black Tulip Chorale. His favorite performance was when he had the opportunity to perform as a supernumerary in The Muny's 2024 production of *Les Miserables*.

Outside of work and music, Robert loves reading, cooking, loving on his two dogs and two cats, and while not an avid gamer, he has an unhealthy obsession with *The Legend of Zelda.*

Gill Waltman

Singer - Sophie Hill



Sophie says that her origins in music undoubtedly came from her parents, who were both in rock bands in the '90s. "Growing up in my small town outside of Lexington, Kentucky, music was always playing in the house, and my parents continued to make music throughout my childhood."

In elementary school, Sophie started voice lessons, and by middle school was singing in the school choir and playing the French horn in the school band. She credits a lot of her musicianship to playing the French horn. At her school, choral students were expected to learn music by listening and reproducing, but in band they were taught how to read and take responsibility for the notes on the page. In high school, Sophie pursued opportunities to sing at higher levels like All-State Choir and Governors School for the Arts, which is a selective Kentucky program that allows students to study their discipline at the collegiate level. This gave Sophie her first look at the potential for great music-making and the joy she felt from being a part of it.

When applying to colleges, Sophia submitted an optional vocal portfolio, not expecting it to have an impact on her pursuit of a degree in the social sciences. However, **Matthew Olson**, the choir director at Carleton College, reached out to her to discuss opportunities with the music department. Before she even set foot on the Minnesota campus, he invited her to work as the choirs' student manager and music librarian, which she did for all four years of college.

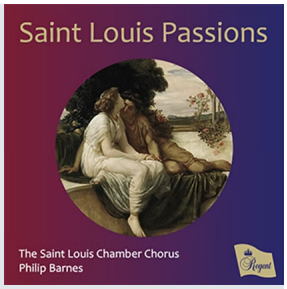
During her time at Carleton, Sophie sang in multiple choirs and groups and attended weekly voice lessons to continue developing her vocal strength and sight-reading ability. Their choir toured in Chicago and Madison, and they had the pleasure of having the concert workshopped by members of VOCES8. Sophie's personal highlight was singing a choral rendition of Radiohead's *Creep*. Olson was a great mentor during this time, encouraging her to build confidence as a musician and giving her the opportunity to fully engage with the choir, not just as a group of performers but as a community with shared values and identities. "The best part of singing in a choir is that you don't do it alone."

Sophie graduated from Carleton College with a BA in Sociology and Anthropology. While employed with the Carleton Choirs, she also worked as a Mental Health Practitioner for a local counseling center. Here she met weekly with children on the autism spectrum to create a safe space for them to practice regulatory and social skills. Upon graduation, she knew she wanted to continue pursuing therapeutic work, which brought her to the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis for the master's program in Social Work.

Despite being a full-time student with a job and practicum to fulfill, only a month after moving, Sophie started to feel the itch to get back to choral music and to continue singing at a high level; the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus greatly exceeded her expectations. "I have grown so much since starting with the SLCC last October. I feel incredibly lucky to make music with this group each week and to sing alongside such talented musicians. It has definitely instilled in me that choir is not something that ends when life transitions and that having the ability to make music with others is a crucial part of my joy and fulfillment."

Gill Waltman

Review of *SAINT LOUIS PASSIONS*



Our most recent recording on the REGENT label, released earlier this year, has already garnered critical praise, including reviews in both the American Record Guide and the Choral Journal ~ the monthly magazine of the American Choral Directors' Association. In the former, **Philip Greenfield** notes that "In this anthology, the SLCC makes clear that its truest Passions are directed toward composers they know personally. So, while they can belt out a bit of Orff, croon Renaissance motets with the best of them, and (with the help of expert arrangers) turn Taylor Swift and Nine Inch Nails into SATB fare, most of the selections come from composers they've commissioned from and worked with."

Among his compliments for the Chorus, Greenfield singles out "impressive music … especially in Mårten Jansson's 'Tonight I Dance Alone', which moves gracefully and lovingly through a series of reflections on a lifetime of love and companionship. (The St. Louis sopranos really sparkle in this one, even in the stratosphere.) In sum, I found much to enjoy from this excellent choir that prefers to keep its repertoire 'in the family.' I suspect our choral aficionados will too."

In the Choral Journal, **Wes Ramsay** suggests that "The Saint Louis Chamber Chorus, under the direction of Philip Barnes, deserve positive attention and emulation." He shrewdly observes that "[the SLCC's] new repertoire calls upon the best skills of both conductor and choir, and both are more than up to the task. The performances are confident, with participants navigating the vocal and musical demands of both new and established repertoire with an assured polish."

NOTEWORTHY NOTES

Visiting Composer Visits



We recently welcomed to St. Louis the Latvian master composer, **Ēriks Ešenvalds,** for the premiere of a new cycle of songs he had been commissioned to write for our season opener. Regular concertgoers will remember two previous Ešenvalds commissions, the first one in 2016 commissioned by **Kris and Craig Suntrup**. (Kris is a soprano with the Chorus.) This was his poignant and memorable setting of Christina Rossetti's "In the Bleak Midwinter." A couple of years later, Ēriks came to St. Louis for the premiere of his setting of words by Khalil Gibran in celebration of soprano **Alice Sherwood's** long service to the Chorus.

Aside from the final rehearsal and the actual concert, visiting composers are invited to meet local choir directors and participate in radio interviews. This visit was no different, with a lively lunch where Ēriks was introduced to a number of area choral musicians. Also, Ēriks talked about his great affection for Teasdale's poetry with **Elaine Cha** at St. Louis Public radio and with **Philip Barnes** on Classic 107.3 FM. Ēriks also found time to visit her grave in the Bellefontaine Cemetery.

Beyond the obvious pleasure of introducing him once again to our audience, his visit provided an invaluable experience for those more closely involved with the new work. For the commissioners of the new music, **Phil and Randi Klasskin**, and the singers themselves, Ēriks' attendance proved both charming and insightful. The Klasskins were able to meet with Ēriks and learn more about his music, and in particular his love for the poetry of St. Louisan, Sara Teasdale. To the singers he brought both his reflections upon her poetry and suggestions for how best to present his new music.

Those fortunate enough to attend the October concert will recall how he rearranged the Chorus into a wide arc that allowed more space between each singer and let their voices 'bloom.' What was not apparent, though, was the last-minute revision that the composer made to the score upon hearing his music. He (and we) felt that the final movement ended too soon and would benefit from being extended: so, the entire last line was repeated to enhance the finality of the text and the music. This is the sort of revision that is only possible once the composer hears their music 'in real time' and with 'real voices.'

Similarly, as we reprise the "Missa Brevis" that our former Composer-in-Residence, **Kerensa Briggs**, wrote for us, there are a few edits that she has made which will now be incorporated in the printed score for other choirs to use. Little will they know that what they sing has gone through such revision!

Philip Barnes



Request for Music Storage Space

SLCC is looking for 800 to 1000 sq ft of storage space for archival music, CDs, risers and historic papers. The storage area must be accessible, and climate controlled. If you have building space available, please let us know. Contact Nancy at (636)458-4343.

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