



VOICEMAIL



WHY WE ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN COMPOSERS

The second SLCC musical event in this pandemic-revised season paired **Philip Barnes** on stage with Advancement Director **Laura Frank** as the moderator for this presentation about women composers.



Each carefully chosen piece of music recorded by the Chorus and broadcast on this occasion was written by a woman composer. Some compositions were commissioned specifically for the Chorus and a few were gifted by the composer. Each performance was illustrated with moving images by Dan Hanson and other contributors.

Between each piece, Laura posed questions to Philip who answered with wonderful details and rich anecdotes about the background of the composer or composition. He showcased several former composers-in-residence with pieces by **Sasha Johnson Manning**, **Clare Maclean** and **Melissa Dunphy**. The concert ended with the beautiful setting of Psalm 121 by **Judith Bingham**, another SLCC favorite, which was commissioned by a consortium of St. Louis choirs in honor of music critic **Sarah Bryan Miller** with its premiere last February.

Philip explained that a future commission from the talented young composer **Dobrinka Tabakova** and her St. Louis visit for its premiere have been shelved for now until everyone can gather safely after the pandemic. However, he had arranged a wonderful Zoom interview with her. Dobrinka described how she researches the background for music she plans to compose, particularly if it has been sung many times before. Philip asked if her approach was different when writing for a specific choir like ours. She said that she researches both the sound of the choir and the space where the music will be performed as writing for a cathedral choir is quite different from writing for a smaller choir. She commented on the distinctive rich sound of the Chorus particularly with the romantic pieces in its broad repertoire.

There was time for one question at the end: Was there a moment or event that led Philip to advocate for women composers? He replied that it was a gradual realization that when the Chorus sang a composition written by a woman, it was looked upon as novel. Since half the population is female, he thought that was just wrong! He commented that women composers should be part of any program anywhere. This event featured music that has been sung by the Chorus during the past decades of advocacy by SLCC for women composers. Philip said that all they need is opportunity and support. He will gladly review quality submissions from composers of any gender or ethnicity. He will continue to advocate until music by a woman composer becomes commonplace rather than newsworthy. He is very grateful that the singers, audience, and board members all support this endeavor.

[To listen to the music, discussion, and Tabakova interview in Presentation II, see last page.]

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Season's Greetings! Happy Holidays! Happy Hannukah! Habari Gani! Merry Christmas!

One uniting theme of the December holidays is music - and particularly choral music. Whether you celebrate a particular holiday yourself or simply enjoy the sounds of the music, you know that you are in a festive season by the fact that the music of various religions and backgrounds is everywhere in December.

The Chorus loves to sing holiday music from all religions and cultures. We have sung Christmas music from past centuries and from countries around the world. We are delighted that we have been able to commission new Christmas music, such as "In the Bleak Midwinter" by Ēriks Ešenvalds, which set the traditional British Christmas carol in his unique way.

Seasonal music is always popular, and some years demand that singers make special accommodations for audiences. For example, we once performed the King's College Cambridge Lessons & Carols in a small, intimate venue, the singers facing each other across the aisle from the choir stalls. It was the first time we

have performed the same concert twice the same day to let our audience enjoy the music in the right setting. This year in the pandemic, King's College Cambridge will perform its Lessons & Carols in an empty chapel. And we will bring our audience and our singers (or at least recorded singers!) together with our virtual presentation rather than a live concert.

Philip Barnes, who was listening to the Ešenvalds/In the Bleak Midwinter as he wrote the following comment, says that this pandemic affords us a unique opportunity - to look back and 'wallow' in some outstanding Christmas pieces. He is very proud and grateful to be associated with the body of work we'll be presenting on December 20th.

So, please enjoy our next presentation, bringing you many carols written expressly for us over the past three decades.

Dick Brickson

REMEMBERING SARAH BRYAN MILLER



Classical music critic and former opera singer **Sarah Bryan Miller** died on November 28 after a long battle with cancer. As music critic for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, she wrote her first review of a Chamber Chorus concert in the spring of 1999 and faithfully attended almost every SLCC concert for the next twenty years.

Her reviews offered shrewd observations, some flattering, some rather blunt, but she always expected very high standards. Her background and experience as a renowned opera singer and print journalist made her a formidable advocate for choral music.

Despite her illness, Bryan continued to attend concerts until the pandemic shutdown and wrote reviews and articles until shortly before her death. Most notably, she was present at the performance of the world premiere of the work commissioned in her honor by a consortium of six St. Louis choirs, including the Chamber Chorus. The music was composed by **Judith Bingham** and performed at Second Presbyterian Church on February 16, 2020. Bryan chose Psalm 121, *I Lift Up Mine Eyes* for the text which Judith, an admirer of Bryan's, set to music.

Linda Ryder, a former SLCC executive director and a longtime friend of Bryan's, shared this story with us. "In the fall of 1998 Bryan and I were both starting new jobs: Bryan as classical music critic for the Post-Dispatch

and I as Executive Director of the St. Louis Chamber Chorus. That December I tried to persuade her to attend the SLCC concert "An Irish Christmas" (which was wildly successful, attracting more than 800 audience members), but she was skeptical and declined. She was not aware of the high quality of the choir and just found the title "folky." She did attend the following spring concerts, and after that experience, she reviewed the Chamber Chorus every chance she could. Bryan later admitted that when she moved to St. Louis, she did not appreciate how good the music in this city was!"

Philip Barnes said this about Bryan. "As I reflect upon the vital contribution that Bryan made to the arts in St. Louis during her two decades as critic, I find myself so grateful for her insight and support of our work. There are few writers so informed about how singers and choirs practice and perform, but that's whom we enjoyed here. Whether she was praising your efforts or challenging you to do better next time, there was never any doubt that Bryan truly appreciated your music-making and wanted to share that with the wider public. We were truly blessed to have such an advocate for choral music; it was a rare privilege to aspire to the professionalism she expected of you. Not only performers, but also composers were grateful to Bryan for championing their efforts: the haunting commission written in her honor by Judith Bingham was testimony to that mutual respect. Despite her passing, we can take comfort knowing that now she is critiquing "the choir of angels" about their intonation, and those pesky cherubic sopranos are screeching a little less!"

JANE GILBERT - LONGTIME SLCC VOLUNTEER AND AVID SUPPORTER



At most SLCC Sunday concerts you can find **Jane Gilbert** at the front desk greeting patrons and selling tickets and CDs. Jane has been an avid supporter of the SLCC for more than 24 years.

A native St. Louisan, Jane graduated from Ladue Horton Watkins High School and then attended the University of Missouri at Columbia (Mizzou) where she

majored in Industrial Psychology. After college, Jane first worked as a political consultant then settled into the banking field for about ten years. She moved to the telecommunications field, eventually ending up on the software side of the industry where she has stayed for more than 23 years. Currently she is an Agile Coach at World Wide Technology. She has also dabbled as a part-time caterer.

Music has long been an important part of Jane's life. She sang in the children's choir at her church growing up and studied classical piano and music theory for ten years at the St. Louis Institute of Music and the Clayton Academy of Music. "Music has always been a large part of my life. I bought my first season subscription to the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra when I was in high school. A high school pal and I so enjoyed going to our Friday concerts." Jane continues to sing today with the St. Peter's Episcopal Church choir where she has been a singer for more than 40 years. Even though she has sung choral music for a long time, Jane does not plan to ever audition for the SLCC. "My contribution

to my church choir is less musical and more on the organizational fun side."

Jane got to know the SLCC through **Philip Barnes** and the many SLCC singers who have been part of her church choir at one point in time. "Philip was great fun to sing with. We also had some lively discussions through the years about American and British politics."

Linda Ryder, a former SLCC executive director, also sings in the church choir and recruited Jane to volunteer with the SLCC on a regular basis. After Jane's first concert, she was hooked. "I love the wide range of music the choir presents, all executed so well."

In addition to music, Jane enjoys traveling, Mizzou football, opera, theatre, training for and participating in 5k, 10k and half marathon races as a walker - and cooking!

The SLCC has utilized Jane's love of cooking and experience as a caterer over the years. Jane has catered various post-concert receptions and the first ever *All about the Pig* intermission reception at the November 2019 concert. "It was fun planning a menu all about pork. I even recruited a couple of friends to decorate more than 125 pig sugar cookies! It was a joy to add the food element to Philip's imaginative theme for that concert." Jane even catered the pre-wedding brunch for Philip and Rachael Barnes' wedding, hosted by Linda and Bruce Ryder.

Over the years, Jane has helped with many SLCC special events including the SLCC 50th anniversary dinner and auction celebration and even provided minor assistance with the chorus donor and subscriber database. Thank you, Jane for your enthusiasm and continued support of the SLCC.

Our Future Awaits

Thanks to all who responded to the recent annual appeal to support the Chamber Chorus. We are all aware of the miserable and devastating effects that this wretched pandemic has had on our families, our livelihoods, our community, and our cultural life. Even as most of us anxiously await the arrival of the promised vaccines in hopes of a return to normalcy in our daily routines, the economic ramifications will take a lot longer to catch up. Institutions that provide grants and support to the arts have been affected too as their own resources have been compromised.

Philip Barnes lamented that the performing arts have been prevented from performing and will survive only because we choose to support them through this crisis. He is confident that the Chamber Chorus will

survive because audiences love to hear people sing together, and because singers love to sing! As you may know, we took the lead to create an alternative to live performance, and are now embarking upon a series of presentations enlivened by our archive of concert recordings.

But how the choir continues is up to all of us who love choral music. We must plan for the return of live singing and the time when we gather again to enjoy landmarks of the repertoire, sung in some of St. Louis's most beautiful locations. Together we can weather this coronavirus storm and emerge to brighten our lives with beautiful music, heartfelt and sung from the soul. Thank you for your support of the Chamber Chorus in these challenging times.

NOTEWORTHY NOTES

SAINT LOUIS PREMIERES CD - ANOTHER NEW REVIEW

The UK journal, *Choir & Organ*, included a review of our recent disc in its Sept/Oct issue and gave us three stars out of five!

'Successful commissioning choirs often suffer from an embarrassment of riches, accumulating bundles of new works that eventually need the seal of a recording. These can be bitty affairs, eclectic to a fault, but important as documentation. So it is with Saint Louis Premieres. The best is very good indeed. Judith Bingham's *Ceaselessly weaving your name* is the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope, told from the distaff (literally) side. It sits well alongside Clare Maclean's *That I did always love* and Eriks Esenvalds *On Friendship* (one of two fine pieces by the Latvian), but the remainder is much more various in quality as well as style. Robert Walker's *The Ale Songbook*, while a gift for all beer drinkers, doesn't quite belong, plonked straight after Jon Garrett's Drink to me only with thine eyes. The energy and commitment of the choir holds it all together, though, and they redeem the day with the closing *Suite Remembrance* by Melissa Dunphy.'

[Brian Morton]

TRIBUTE TO SARAH BRYAN MILLER

For more about the extraordinary and talented Sarah Bryan Miller, read the tribute to her in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

<https://bit.ly/3p2Ganw>

MAKING A DONATION TO THE CHORUS

By credit card, go to www.chamberchorus.org/donate

By check, mail to: St. Louis Chamber Chorus
St. Louis Chamber Chorus
P.O. Box 11558
St. Louis, MO 63105

VIEW OUR NOVEMBER 'CONCERT' PRESENTATION

Presentation II is now available for everyone to view on YouTube:

https://youtu.be/2_5Azz3tXAc

Learn about the women writing for the choir in a conversation with artistic director Philip Barnes and advancement director Laura Frank, including a special interview with **Dobrinka Tabakova**. You will also hear archival recordings sung by the choir which are complemented by images selected by board member **Dan Hanson**.

The St. Louis Chamber Chorus' YouTube Channel can be found here

<http://www.youtube.com/c/STLchamber>

There you will find professionally-produced videos from this season as well as past seasons, featuring videos with new composers, new commissions, and singer interviews, among others. When you visit, be sure to click the SUBSCRIBE button and also the "bell" icon to receive notifications when we post new videos.

Katie Sandquist

THE GIFT OF MUSIC

Do you need a gift for yourself or someone else? Consider the gift of music.

The St. Louis Chamber Chorus has produced several CDs that are available for purchase on our website. Our most recent release *St. Louis Premieres* is particularly meaningful because it features music written specifically for the Chorus and our unique sound. Order a CD (or two or three!) today.

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