



VOICEMAIL



CHAMBER CHORUS COLLABORATES FOR NEW SEASON



As the first notes of the Vivaldi *Gloria* soared to fill the auditorium, it was apparent that the Chamber Chorus singers, masked and fully vaccinated, were back! It was an extraordinary and sensual experience

to hear the full force of live music (as opposed to recorded music for over a year) that one might describe it as comparing two-dimensional music to this outstanding 3-dimensional performance.

Audience members, the singers and performers went through stringent screening methods to ensure everyone's safety on October 3 in Washington University's 560 building, where the first concert of this in-person season was staged. The Vivaldi and Monteverdi pieces, which comprised the larger part of the repertoire, were heightened by collaborations with instrumentalists. Collaboration is the theme for this season. The singers were accompanied in this concert by two violins played by **Hannah Frey** and **Rebecca Chung**, a harpsichord with a virtuoso performance by **David Sinden**, and our own star pianist, **Diana Umali**.

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Although this audience is unaccustomed to hearing our a *cappella* choir with any instrumental accompaniment, it did not detract in any way – rather, it enhanced the aural and visual experience. The harpsichord owned by the university is quite a conversation piece, aside from its angelic tones and the masterfully played pieces. (See more on page 4.)

The highlight of the concert was the world premiere of *We are the Music Makers* by composer **Melissa Dunphy** and commissioned by **Dr. Stacey**

Albin-Wilson. The music was so beautifully melodic and moving that **Philip Barnes** conducted it a second time as an encore – to rousing enthusiasm by the audience. An even more exciting touch was that Melissa was there in person to receive the standing ovation!

Gill Waltman

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE ST. LOUIS CHAMBER CHORUS:

You listen to the Chorus at our live concerts and on our recordings. Clearly, **Philip Barnes** and the singers are the face and the voices of the Chorus. But many others serve the SLCC in other, less visible ways, playing key and important roles in bringing the Chorus to you.

One vital part of our organization is the Board of Directors. Each year, we may add some new directors, and some long-serving directors serve their final terms. I would love to acknowledge both our new directors and our departing board members.

Deane Thompson sang in the Chorus for several years, and then served as our treasurer and as a key member of the Board for many more years. Deane passed away last month. (See page 4.) We will all miss Deane.

Two other board members retired this year. **Eric Tremayne**, a well-recognized St. Louis lawyer with

knowledge and experience in the arts, joined us in 2018 and retired this year for health reasons. His input has been invaluable.

Bentley Caughlan served (along with **Sarah Milunski**) as a singer representative on the Board. Bentley retired from the board this year, mentioning that being a new father of two, buying a new house and starting seminary studies might interfere with his Board work! We thank both Eric and Bentley for their service and will miss them as well.

We are delighted to introduce two new directors who will serve on the Board; **Marni Dillard** and **Chris Boemler** (See next page). Chris is a Chorus member and joins Sarah as our second singer representative. We welcome both Marni and Chris.

Dick Brickson

SARAH MILUNSKI - SINGER HIGHLIGHT



Sarah is a St. Louis native who grew up loving music—although early, unverified reports indicate that her early performances of children's classics accompanied by pots and pans was acoustically displeasing and pitchy. Sarah's earliest choral experience was in the children's choir at her

parish, where she sang for a couple of years and learned some of the basics of choral singing. She joined the adult church choir before middle school, which is where she first learned to sight read (as the tenure of the other choral members was measured in decades and parts were rarely practiced individually during rehearsal).

Growing up, Sarah played flute and piano along with singing in both her church and school choirs. She was selected to sing in the Missouri all-state choir in high school the year when **Bob Chilcott** (a frequent composer of Chamber Chorus commissions) directed.

Sarah started taking voice lessons in college with **Professor Teresa Hopkin**, where she learned that, despite singing alto her entire life, she was actually a soprano. During college, she participated in the university chorus, concert choir, and the Master Singers (a guinea pig chorus for master's students in conducting to practice directing), all under the expert direction of **Dr. Eric Nelson**. In her junior year, the concert choir toured in Italy, where Sarah enjoyed sampling every flavor of gelato that the country had to offer between singing in some breathtaking venues.

Sarah met future husband Matt at Emory University. He was in graduate school studying for a masters in industrial organizational psychology and is now a software developer. Sarah graduated with a double major in music and philosophy but scaled back her singing to focus on law school. Graduating from SLU Law as salutatorian, she joined Lewis Rice, LLC as an associate and is now a partner in the litigation department. Even during law school, Sarah kept a toe in the door by continuing to sing and cantor at church. Luckily, **Orin Johnson** filled in as music director for one of the masses she sang in and encouraged her to audition for the Chamber Chorus. She did and, after a season as an alto alternate and studying with **Sheila Dugan** to regain her range, moved back to the soprano ranks.

After several years as a full member of the Chorus, Sarah joined the Chamber Chorus Board in 2018 as a singer representative and was proud to be a part of the Chorus' quick pivot at the start of the pandemic. Thanks to Philip's creative thinking during a year when choral singing was one of the riskiest activities imaginable, the choir survived a year-long sabbatical. Now, Sarah is excited to pick up where the Chorus left off, with a season that not only allows the group to sing together, but also to enjoy repertoire that was previously unexplored - singing with instruments! Although the three-hour, masked rehearsals can be tiring (especially as Sarah and Matt are looking forward to welcoming their second baby boy into the world next spring), it has been excellent training for the real task master; her soon-to-be five-year-old son Benji who requests live performances of *All the Pretty Little Horses* and other lullabies on repeat.

MARNI DILLARD – CLASSICIST AND NEW BOARD MEMBER



Marni was born and raised in Saint Louis and graduated from Mary Institute. She met her future husband **Bob Martyn**, who attended Country Day School, at the ripe age of thirteen; they graduated the same year. Bob is a former member of the SLCC board. Marni attended

Northwestern University where she majored in Latin and minored in French. After graduation she returned to St. Louis. Her parents ran into her former Latin teacher who told them about an opening for a teaching intern in the Classics Department at John Burroughs School. “Miraculously, I was hired, and it was during my brief tenure at Burroughs that I first met **Philip Barnes** and learned about the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus.”

Marni’s teaching experience was so satisfying and inspirational that she decided to attend a graduate program in Classics at the University of Washington in order to expand her knowledge base. After earning an MA in Classics, she married her aforementioned sweetheart, who was serving in the US Air Force as a fighter pilot at the time. They led the itinerant life of a military family until moving back to St. Louis in 2006.

Soon after her return to St. Louis, Marni rejoined the Classics Department at John Burroughs where she still teaches full time. Bob and Marni have three children; Alex (22), Phoebe (18) and Sandy (11) with whom they love spending time. Marni loves to travel. She plans to visit Italy with Phoebe in March and Greece with Sandy in June. They are all musically talented, and though Marni’s singing experience is limited to singing in her high school choir, she is looking forward to serving on the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus Board.

CHRIS BOEMLER – NEW SINGER REPRESENTATIVE TO THE BOARD



Born and raised in Barnhart, Mo., Chris Boemler had a love for music inspired in him from a young age by his mother and father, taking piano lessons from the former. In junior high, Chris played trombone and tuba in the school band, at church and anywhere else someone would let him. He

began private lessons in trombone with **Tom Poshak** and voice with **Laura Vaughan**. Chris spent many fond nights singing around the piano with his father Dale, who was an incredible tenor, and his twin brother Derek. He sang under the direction of **Mark Cotter**, whom he holds as a major part of the inspiration to go into the field of music education.

At Missouri State University in Springfield, Chris received dual bachelor’s degrees in vocal and instrumental music education, studying under the batons of **Guy B. Webb**, **Belva Prather**, **Jerry Hoover**, and **Robert Quebbeman**,

and in studio with **Bill Hartman** and **Michael Stine** in trombone, **Wei-Han Su** in piano, and **Richard Todd Payne** in voice. After graduation in 2012, Chris was hired by the Jackson R-2 school district in Jackson, Mo., where he taught for 5 years.

In 2014, he received a master’s of music education degree from VanderCook College of Music in Chicago, Ill., graduating just 13 months after beginning the program. In 2017, he was hired as the choral director at Festus High School, where he conducts over 180 singers and teaches beginning piano and music theory.

In August 2017, Chris joined the bass section of the Chamber Chorus. (Read a full singer highlight in the May 2019 issue (<https://bit.ly/30j8USi>)). Chris and his wife Laura welcomed their daughter Nora Grace in December of 2019, and reside in a newly renovated home in South County.

Chris currently serves on the executive board of the Missouri Choral Directors Association, representing the East Central District, and is enjoying his new term on the SLCC Board.

Melissa Dunphy Visits Middle School in SLCC’s Outreach Program

As part of the Chamber Chorus’ outreach efforts to encourage young musicians and advocate for women composers, visiting composer **Melissa Dunphy** spent time with students at Brittany Woods Middle School in University City. This took place on Friday October 1 during her brief in-person visit to St. Louis to attend the world premiere of her new composition *We Are The Music Makers*.

To the students’ surprise Dunphy shared that she didn’t start her career thinking she’d become a musician and composer. In fact, her mother wanted her to pursue a medical degree and she spent some time training for

the medical profession. But ultimately, Dunphy’s call to music was too strong to deny. To encourage their own inner musicians, Dunphy asked the students if they’d ever thought about becoming composers and described how they already were composers if they’d ever hummed or sung their own note passages.

At one point, a student asked, “what’s your most useless talent?” Dunphy then proceeded to play the piano upside down. (If you have not experienced this, it is a must!) She generously engaged students for 90 minutes of lecture, evoking thoughtful questions and discussions.

NOTEWORTHY NOTES

REMEMBERING DEANE THOMPSON



It is with sadness that we announce the passing in September of a favorite longtime SLCC singer and board member. Deane sang tenor with the choir for many years and later contributed in so many ways on Board committees and as treasurer.

He was the subject of three VoiceMail articles; one was a singer highlight; another was on the topic of perfect pitch (which he had); and the most recent one last July was on his retirement from the Board. He also contributed meticulous articles to the newsletter that were informative and thought-provoking – such as his two-part series defining the characteristics that were required for an *a cappella* singer to meet the demands of the Chamber Chorus.

Deane was a delight to be around, and we will all miss his wise counsel, gentle demeanor, and that winning smile.

Gill Waltman

OUR MUSIC HAS LEGS ...

When we commission a new work, we intend for it to enrich both our repertoire, and that of the wider choral community. After all, there are plenty of contemporary pieces that languish after their first performance, and we don't want 'our' commissions to be among them! Spreading the word about these new works can involve professional recordings on CD and online, notifications in specialist journals like "Choir & Organ", and publication by prominent companies like E. C. Schirmer/MorningStar.

Recent notices from the UK suggest that **Melissa Dunphy's** music is attracting the right sort of attention. Her "Mourning into Dancing," which we premiered in 2018, was sung at Westminster Abbey this past July by the chamber choir "HESPEROS," and it has now been selected for a program by the BBC Singers, to be broadcast next February.

Philip Barnes

HARPSICHORD BUILT BY LOCAL CRAFTSMAN

The beautiful harpsichord used in the October concert was made by a famous harpsichord builder right here in St. Louis in 1994. **Dr. Peter Tkach***, who died in 2015, had a national reputation as a harpsichord builder. He built 86 of these historical keyboard instruments with artistic decorations painted by his wife Andrea. These harpsichords are located and treasured across the country in churches, universities, schools, and homes, and were all hand-delivered in person by Dr. Tkach to each buyer. This particular one is owned by Washington University. **Jane Gilbert** recognized it as there is a similar one at St. Peter's Church.



Dr. Tkach was a notable choral conductor who directed high school, college, and church choirs throughout his life. He began building harpsichords as a hobby in the 1960s and later devoted himself full time to this undertaking, even

commissioning new music for harpsichords. He was a longtime resident of Webster Groves and built the instruments in a shop in his basement. To set a sound board properly required a highly skilled technique used in the 17th and 18th centuries involving controlled temperature and humidity.

Gill Waltman

(*Tkach is pronounced T-catch)

GENEROSITY - THROUGH GIFTS AND BEQUESTS

During the pandemic we, like so many, have lost several long-time friends of the Chorus, but their generosity, shown through gifts and bequests, demonstrates their commitment to our mission that will literally outlive all our lives. We particularly remember with gratitude **John Clayton, Carol McCarthy Duhme, Joan Blase Goodson, and Deane Thompson** for the diverse gifts they brought to the choir. May we ask you to follow their example through a donation or provision in your estate planning? Contact **Laura Frank**, our Director of Advancement, to discuss your choices.

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