



VOICEMAIL



IN THIS ISSUE

Message from the President

Hannah Gallop – audio engineer and event planner

Brent Johnson – organist and streaming expert

Architecture and Repertoire

THE
SAINT LOUIS
CHAMBER
CHORUS

COMPOSER-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM NOW IN ITS 22ND YEAR



Two more excellent conversations with completely different topics took place in February and April as part of this season's innovative SLCC speaker series.

On Sunday Feb 21, the topic discussed was our composer-in-residence program that has featured five remarkable composers since its inception in 1999. **Artistic Director Philip Barnes** and **Assistant Conductor Orin Johnson** described these talented individuals and played recordings of their compositions written expressly for the Chorus.

Philip began with **Sasha Johnson Manning**, our first composer-in-residence and a childhood friend of his in England. He described their chance encounter again as adults and how they developed a mutual respect for each other's talents. Sasha quickly learned the sound of our capable singers and ever since she has composed works that she knows will suit their ensemble, as well as showcase her music. Sasha has visited St. Louis on several occasions when her compositions were premiered, and she hopes to return this November for her latest work specifically written for the Chorus.

Sasha was followed by **Clare Maclean**, **Yakov Gubanov** and **Melissa Dunphy** – all gifted composers with their own unique and different styles. They have in common with Sasha a firsthand knowledge of how the singers perform, and so they can challenge them to the highest level, knowing they will excel. Those listening to this presentation heard some of the composers' outstanding commissions sung with perfect rendition. These three composers have also visited St. Louis, met the singers and board members, and heard their compositions in live performance. Philip noted that Clare Maclean had never traveled to the northern hemisphere until she came to St. Louis!

Our current composer-in-residence **Mårten Jansson** has already visited St. Louis on a couple of occasions and intended to come again last December, until the pandemic changed the plans. Philip shared a recorded interview with Mårten in which they discussed his career, together with the coming Christmas program which will feature Mårten's *Missa Popularis* for choirs and strings.

The next presentation, on Sunday April 11, saw Philip and architectural historian **Esley Hamilton** talking about the intersection of architecture and repertoire. Read about the presentation on page 4. See also the feature article about Esley in the last issue of VoiceMail.

Gill Waltman

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

We are so proud of the St. Louis arts community and of its creativity. When the pandemic prevented us from safely singing or playing indoors for you like we normally do, our community found ways to use our assets inventively, present our art in different ways and bring our music to you, their audiences. We had to be flexible in the face of evolving pandemic problems and of the ever-changing facts and best practices.

For example, Opera Theater of St. Louis created its own outdoor venue, set up seating with appropriate social distance, selected its operas to perform without an intermission and created a very flexible pricing and refund policy to encourage audiences to feel comfortable. The American Chamber Chorale rehearsed with 8 singers who were 20 feet apart, and with the rest of the group participating on Zoom. It then created several short “surprise” recordings for its audiences, combining live, socially distanced singers and orchestra members with others recorded from home.

Similarly, the Sheldon created Picnics on the Plaza, presenting casual outdoor concerts on its Steward Family Plaza at which audiences could hear its artists’

music and enjoy a picnic dinner and drinks at socially distanced tables. The City Foundry moved its concert series outside, so that audiences could sit at tables, with lots of space to make everyone comfortable, and hear St. Louis musicians like the Funky Butt Brass Band.

For its part, the St. Louis Chamber Chorus decided early last year to eliminate its live concerts, took advantage of its very large library of recordings of its past concert performances and created this series of live presentations. We have given you a “peek behind the curtains”, with **Philip Barnes** and others combining our recordings (many of which were not previously available to the public) with gorgeous photography to show how our music is brought to life in performance. We presented these performances live, streamed them live and made them available as podcasts for our subscribers and then for the general public.

We are proud to be a part of this wonderful St. Louis community of artists. May we all keep parts of our creative responses to the pandemic alive, but also return to presenting live concerts that you, and we, love.

Dick Brickson

HANNAH GALLOP – AUDIO ENGINEER AND EVENT PLANNER



Hannah Gallop was born and raised in St. Louis and went to Oakville Senior High School (for those who also grew up here!) While in high school, she participated in the marching band and played the oboe in the wind symphony. Later in school, she began taking voice lessons. However, Hannah says she would

not classify herself as a singer in any way, despite her enjoyment of the craft.

“Going into college, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to learn. I knew I was interested in performance but wanted something more stable than performing myself. Introducing... the world of technology. I knew tech was something that wouldn’t be disappearing anytime soon, so this seemed like the logical choice. So, off to college I went, where I grew in more ways than I can fathom.”

Four years later Hannah graduated from Webster University, being a recent graduate of the lost year 2020. Graduating from college while the entire world was coping with the effects of the pandemic did not bode well for the start of her career. Thankfully, it was around this time that she was hired by Third Baptist Church and - soon after - the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus, working as an audio engineer for in-house and broadcast sound.

Prior to working with the Chamber Chorus, Hannah worked at other churches around St. Louis and as a

freelancer for audio books, commercials, and films. She has assisted in studio construction at the St. Louis Recording Club as well as Webster University, where rooms were uprooted and relocated. More recently, she has been hired full time at Conference Technologies, Inc. as a live event technician. Now Hannah can be found at major conferences and conventions “working with all types of fun toys... ahem, *equipment*.”

Despite her technology background, Hannah’s strongest area of expertise is in event planning and execution. She has helped coordinate six international conventions, the attendance at which has spanned from 500 to 15,000 people. She coordinated the largest, student-led tech conference of its kind in the world. She has been a member of various local art events around town, including art exhibitions, film festivals, local concert series, and silent films (which she helped sound reinforce).

Though she is still young, Hannah admits that her skills extend far beyond what she learned in college and finding live event work during a pandemic has been nothing short of a miracle. Without groups like the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus transitioning from live to virtual events, technicians like Hannah would be struggling. “I cannot thank the Chamber Chorus enough for the time and opportunities provided. It has been an absolute honor to support chamber choral music, especially when the process involves a virtual audience. Thank you for your music, and the light it brings to our world.”

BRENT JOHNSON – ORGANIST AND STREAMING EXPERT



Brent has been serving as organist of Third Baptist Church since 2005. At that time, he was also working as a technician for the Wicks Organ Company of Highland, Illinois. His job took him all over the area and to other parts of the country tuning, repairing, and installing and relocating pipe organs. He took this position in 1998 after

studying organ at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

Brent grew up in a small town just south of Dallas, and studying organ was an accident. Professors from SMU heard him playing at church while evaluating a student music director and mentioned that they needed organists. Brent had auditioned at various schools as a percussionist. He was fortunate to have been surrounded by a rich musical environment at school and at church, and never really considered any other kind of work. Brent's parents were early adopters of technology, and his older brother was a very talented electrical engineer and designer. Brent grew up learning to program computers and put together small electrical kits and had a fascination for radios and recording. The first "band" he played in was just a duo playing drums and piano with a friend who played guitar and bass that they assembled musically on a multi-track recorder.

In 2003 Brent started a project to share classical organ music with the wider world (specifically the work of

the Wicks Organ Company). With the help of some colleagues, they started a simple little low-bandwidth stream of classical organ music. That project grew into the non-profit Organ Media Foundation that was incorporated in 2011. Today that organization is responsible for three such streaming stations with relays in North America and Europe, a podcast, and for the past three years, a YouTube series that has taken Brent around the country exploring pipe organs inside and out - and recording some of the country's finest organists.

When not at the console or inside of an organ, Brent can often be found working with his wife Carrie Bradfield on their historic house in Carondelet. "We have a wood shop in the basement; we both learned woodturning at Craft Alliance in Grand Center (I'm ok, she's amazing) and when performances return, you'll probably see us out on a Friday night at Opera Theatre or at Powell Hall."

Brent describes this past year as a unique one. "It has been both tense and exciting to see how arts organizations have found creative ways to stay vibrant and alive. Working directly with **Philip Barnes** at Third Baptist, I've had a front-row seat to the process and thoughts on how to best maintain the expected quality of the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus, while still keeping safety a priority. I've been happy to bring my experience to the presentations this past year - and pleased with the success they've found. But I also look forward to the day when I can return to being an appreciative audience member at Chamber Chorus concerts."

Streaming Live Performances

Recorded selections of music from the Chorus archives enhanced with images chosen by **Dan Hansen** created a masterful combination of sight and sound designed to please our faithful audience. Production of the live-streamed presentation required additional expertise not generally within the skillset of an artistic director. Two talented people at Third Baptist Church provided the technical knowledge to bring the concept to our remote listeners.

Brent Johnson turned out to be an invaluable resource for the series, because of his expertise with the American Guild of Organists' presentations here in St. Louis, as well as his familiarity with the audio-visual facilities at Third Baptist Church where he serves as organist. The final lynchpin in our production came in the person of **Hannah Gallop**, who takes charge of all our sound issues, from the microphones and

loudspeakers in the room, to the successful streaming of the shows to our remote audiences.

Hannah came highly recommended by her former teacher at Webster University, our own sound engineer **Daniel Ruder**, and his praise was fully justified. She has proven both capable and unflappable, two qualities that are essential in such a complex operation.

Although there were other details - like copyrights and permissions - that had to be addressed in order for the presentations to be shown, it has become clear that everything is secondary to the contributions of Dan, Brent and Hannah. We are all so fortunate that they agreed to work together on this project; most of its success is due to their (appropriately) harmonious collaboration.

Philip Barnes

NOTEWORTHY NOTES

ARCHITECTURE AND REPERTOIRE



The April 11 presentation featured a conversation between **Philip Barnes** and architectural historian **Esley Hamilton** discussing the intersection of architecture and repertoire.

Esley, a former Chorus member, possesses an encyclopedic knowledge of architecture in St. Louis and has been the ideal person to write about Philip's chosen venues and how they complement the repertoire and particular theme. For many years, Esley has written a detailed description of the venue in the season's program notes for each of the six concerts. This allows the audience to read about the history and architecture of the building as they hear it responding to the choir's voices.

Some of our chosen buildings are well known to the general public, such as the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis or Christ Church Cathedral; other venues offer rare opportunities to explore treasures such as St. Stanislaus Kostka Polish Catholic Church or the St. Francis de Sales Oratory. From time-to-time Philip reveals his quirky sense of humor and has held concerts in such unlikely venues as a wrestling club, a library, and a former swimming pool! And for each one Esley has written an architectural and historical summary that explains how apt it is as a Chorus venue.

The presentation was one of the longer ones to date, but the opportunity to record for posterity so much about the sheer variety of venues, together with an account of these 'marriages' of music and place, was not to be missed. In all, Philip and Esley discussed fully a third of the choir's venues in its sixty-five years of history; their discussion ranged from architects and city planners to ethnic neighborhoods and traditions. The presentation served as a reminder of how richly blessed is St. Louis in its heritage and gifted local artists; and it is still available to watch online!

Gill Waltman

THREE-DIMENSIONAL CHESS?

To declare this a *most unusual* season is an exercise in understatement. The challenge of mastering some sixty different pieces for six distinct acoustics during a normal season paled before the prospect of creating a series of retrospectives that would engage our audience. We soon realized that the new season was akin to three-dimensional chess!

Repertoire had to be selected as always, but we were limited by what we already had in our sound archive. At this point our Board recognized that we needed to consolidate what had been a ramshackle set of cassette and CD recordings into a coherent and digitized archive – an eye-watering challenge that eventually yielded more than 200 hours of sound.

Then came that extra dimension, that of selecting images to enliven the recordings. Furthermore, we had to recruit a person who knew how to marry visuals and music, and who would take on the enormous task of locating thousands of images from which to create a different montage for every piece we played. In this we were extraordinarily blessed to number among our Board members **Professor Dan Hanson**; he had some previous experience in what was needed, and what was more important, the belief that this task could be achieved in a remarkably short time. Dan was able to draw on not only his own treasure of images, but also the contributions of other photographers, notably **Matt Chapman**. Read more about what Dan called "imagining what music looks like" in his August 2020 VoiceMail article.

Meanwhile, the sound archive was taking shape through the work of artistic director Philip Barnes and the talented team at Third Baptist Church. See more on page 3.

Philip Barnes

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