



# VOICEMAIL



## COMMONWEALTH



Queen Elizabeth II was born on April 21, 1926 and reigned for seventy years. The Chamber Chorus celebrated Her Royal Highness a century after her birth, with a concert at Christ Church Cathedral in downtown St. Louis, and also recognized the seventy-year history of the Chamber Chorus. This season's theme, *Voices of Change*, may reflect how much change the Queen experienced over her lifetime. She lived through WWII and during her reign, saw the British Empire evolve into a commonwealth of nations, reflecting the title of this concert.

To commemorate her coronation in 1953, ten poets and ten composers were commissioned to create a song cycle of ten modern madrigals, named

*A Garland for the Queen*. The pieces were sung together on the eve of the coronation. Although individual pieces have been sung by the Chorus before, the complete song cycle has rarely been performed anywhere in its entirety since then, as many of the pieces are very challenging.

At the Sunday April 19 concert, the Chorus took up the challenge and the entire song cycle was performed. This led to a much longer first half than is customary for an SLCC concert, for both singers and audience members, but it featured many well-known composers and poets from that era. Composers dated back to William Byrd (who wrote for Queen Elizabeth I) to nineteenth and twentieth century composers including Arthur Bliss, Herbert Howells, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Gerald Finzi, and poets such as Louis McNiece, and Walter de la Mare. It was interesting to see some of the pairings, as well as the combinations of wide-ranging texts then set to music. Music critic **George Yeh** from Substack, commented in his review, "Not surprisingly, the result is a musical patchwork quilt, where presumably none of the creatives knew what any of the others was doing."

The Chamber Chorus's seventy-year history coincides almost exactly with the seventy-year reign of HRH. A particularly appropriate new commission by English composer **Sasha Johnson Manning**, who was present for the concert, recognized this historic milestone. This composition, which began the second half, set Psalm 90 to her usual beautiful and inspiring music with one notable verse stating "thou art come to three score years and ten." This was a challenging piece and the Choir handled it with aplomb.

Following Sasha's premiere were two versions of *The Silver Swan*; the original, by Orlando Gibbons, and a more recent version by Bob Chilcott with phrases reminiscent of his beloved *Before the Ice*. The concert concluded with another Ralph Vaughan Williams piece, suitably titled *The New Commonwealth*.

**Gill Waltman**

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SAINT LOUIS  
CHAMBER  
CHORUS

## Message from the President

Dear Friends,

In February, we briefly introduced three wonderful, new directors – **Bruce Ryder, Brook Bisailon** and **Julie Schuster**. They are all distinguished players in the music community bringing different skills, talents and backgrounds to our board. Today, we are proud to give you more information about them on these pages.

I love it when we can add new talent to our board. On the other hand, I hate it when we lose someone with very real talent and a very strong devotion to the SLCC.

**Katie Sandquist** became our Executive Director in 2020, taking over from **Laura Frank**. Katie then served as Executive Director until 2023. When we hired **Nancy Burstein** to succeed Katie in that role, Katie agreed to continue to serve as our Administrative Manager and as a member of our board ever since. Katie moved to Colorado this Spring – she said something about wanting to be with her husband and kids just because they moved there as well.

Katie was invaluable to the Chorus. She served well in her formal roles, but, more importantly, she cared very much about the Chorus. She looked for things we needed, places we needed to improve and ways to make us better and then found ways to fill all those needs. Katie, we will miss you, but we wish you the very best in your new life in Colorado.

This Spring, **Renée Olo** agreed to assume Katie's role as our Administrative Manager. Renée is originally from Canada and is a lifelong choral singer. She comes to us by way of Philip's choir at Third Baptist where she is a section lead. Learn more about Renée and how she ended up in St. Louis in our August newsletter.

Our May concert, *Equality/Half the Sky*, wraps up our season. We will share more about next season in our August newsletter. I look forward to seeing you next October as we launch the new season.

**Dick Brickson**

## Bruce Ryder – New Board Member



Bruce Ryder is the most recently elected member of the Chamber Chorus Board of Directors, but his association with the choir goes back nearly 50 years.

Bruce grew up in the Kansas City area. He attended the

University of Kansas, majoring in French and history, and then attended Harvard Law School. Throughout high school and college he sang in school choirs and performed musical theatre, including lead roles in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown*, and *Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*. In law school he participated in the Drama Society, which presented an original musical comedy every year using themes like Sherlock Holmes or the Arthurian legends to parody life at the law school.

After graduating from law school in 1979, Bruce moved to St. Louis and joined the law firm of Coburn, Croft, Shepherd, Herzog & Putzell, which after several mergers is now Thompson Coburn LLP. He was elected partner in 1985 and remained with the firm until his retirement in 2023.

After Bruce arrived in St. Louis, he knew that joining a choir would be a good way to meet like-minded people, so he auditioned for the Bach Society. Its music director, **Ronald Arnatt** (founder of the Chamber Chorus), was also the music director at Christ Church Cathedral and invited Bruce to join both groups. Bruce

also sang in the 1979 Christmas concert of the St. Louis Chamber Chorus (and Orchestra) under **Allen Carl Larson**, but work and other commitments prevented him from continuing with the Chamber Chorus at that time. He sang with the Bach Society until 1985 and served as its Treasurer from 1983 to 1985.

In October 1984 Bruce met a young CPA named **Linda Kinnard** on a blind date! They were married a year later. Linda and Bruce sang with the Christ Church Cathedral Choir under **Pat Partridge** from 1986 to 1990. Another singer who joined that choir was a young Englishman who had recently moved to St. Louis, **Philip Barnes**. After Philip was appointed Music Director of the Chamber Chorus, Bruce re-auditioned for the group. He sang as a full-place tenor from 1991 to 2017 and has been an alternate since then. Linda served as Executive Director of the Chamber Chorus from 1997 until her retirement in 2017. Bruce and Linda have sung in the choir at St. Peter's Episcopal Church since 1993.

In 2022, Bruce joined the Board of Trustees of the VOCES8 Foundation USA, which conducts choral music education programs throughout the US, as well as supporting the activities of the British choral groups VOCES8 and Apollo5 and sponsoring the new US upper-voice ensemble Lyyra. He currently serves as its Secretary.

Bruce is looking forward to serving on the Board and hopes that his long history with the group, together with his experience in singing with and managing other choral organizations, will be an asset to the organization as it moves forward.

## Julie Schuster – New Board Member

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Julie grew up in Quincy, Illinois, on a farm, where she would serenade the sheep, cows, and chickens (not terribly appreciative audiences). She began singing with other humans in middle school and continued to be a member of various choirs and perform in school musical

productions throughout high school.

Julie attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she sang with the University Chorus and Women's Glee Club (alto 2) while she majored in print journalism. She met her future husband Glen, a member of the Varsity Men's Glee Club and The Other Guys *a capella* group, at, of course, a college performance. The pair married immediately after they finished school and would go on to raise three sons who would all end up singing and playing multiple instruments. According to Julie's brother-in-law, being in their home is often akin to, quote, "being in a (expletive) musical".

After college and before children, Julie worked at newspapers, as a textbook editor, and as the publications coordinator at the Chicago Botanic Garden. The Schusters moved to St. Louis in 2005, and Julie shifted course to become a volunteer at her sons' schools. There, among many other roles, she was president of the Ladue

Education Foundation. She also began volunteering at the new classical radio station, Classic 107.3, in 2013 and eventually joined the staff — first on a part-time basis, then full-time, and now serves as the general manager and CEO. Julie hosts a weekly themed program called "Aisle Seat" on Sundays at 5pm and can also be heard on-air from 10pm-midnight every night except Friday, as well as from 6-9am on Saturday mornings.

Julie got to know Philip through his Thursday night program on Classic 107.3, "Rechoired Listening", and is very pleased to join the board of the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus, an ensemble that she views as an extraordinary cultural treasure. Julie especially enjoys interviews with the female composers championed by the Chamber Chorus and has been fortunate enough to speak with **Sasha Johnson Manning**, **Kerensa Briggs**, and **Melissa Dunphy** on several occasions. Of course, nothing quite compares to conversations with Philip, which generally involve a thorough scouring from his dry British wit.

When Julie is not in a radio studio, she can usually be found in a dance studio, where she practices her favorite pastime — salsa! She has traveled to salsa congresses in Indianapolis, Chicago, San Diego, and NYC over the past two years and truly fallen in love with the sport. Her current favorite dance song is *Barranquilla Está de Moda*, by Grupo Niche, which celebrates the city of Barranquilla, Colombia.

## Brook Bisailon – New Board Member

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Brook Davis Bisailon was raised in St. Louis by parents who had a deep respect and love for the arts. Together they introduced their children to musicals at the Muny and Fox, operas at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and jazz at the Sheldon and the Bistro. Brook began

piano lessons at the age of 7 with **Phyllis Hyken** who challenged her to play anywhere she got a chance. By the end of high school Brook was playing for the theatre and choral department of Ladue High School as well as accompanying for other teachers' private studios.

Brook received her Bachelors of Music Education from Illinois Wesleyan University in 2010 where her choral education received a sound foundation from **Scott Ferguson** and the Collegiate Choir. Brook continued to play piano through college working in every genre, including playing in a jazz band where she met her husband, Jacob, who told her she was "too square" for that kind of music. Despite that, he taught her to appreciate the genre and even be able to fake a little knowledge of it. She continued her education at Illinois State University where she studied Collaborative Piano with **Dr. Tuyen Tonnu** and **Dr. Joshua Russell**. To help

support her graduate work, Brook took advantage of several opportunities, playing for the First National Tour of "Wicked," working as an accompanist and vocal coach at Illinois Wesleyan University, as well as for the opera and theatre department at Illinois State University.

Brook currently works for Lindbergh Schools teaching and accompanying the high school and middle school choirs. She and Jacob now have two children, Guy (9), and Margot (7) who are both as music obsessed as their parents. One of the most rewarding parts of returning home was the chance to be a part of the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus. She joined in 2013 and was a full member through 2025. She is very grateful now to be given the opportunity to serve on the board of this amazing organization.

Brook says, "Singing with the chorus was such a fulfilling experience and I learned so much from Philip and the amazing musicians in the choir. Having been a part of the choir for so many years, and knowing the dedication of all involved, as well as the diverse repertoire that Philip programs, I have acquired a great appreciation for this organization. It is such a unique ensemble that deserves to be supported in every possible way, and I am grateful to have the chance to do that now as part of the board."

# NOTEWORTHY NOTES

## JUSTICE

The February 15 concert in this season's *Voices of Change* focused on Justice. As **Philip Barnes** stated, the pursuit of justice lies at the heart of any society. Visionary figures such as presidents—like Abraham Lincoln, and civil rights' activists—like Martin Luther King, have led the way, and their powerful words and passions are even more compelling when set to music. Some familiar composers have lent their strengths to this topic, and were featured in the program, held at Salem United Methodist Church.

The concert began with English cathedral musician Christopher Dearnley's *Let Thy Hand Be Strengthened*, written for Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee. The words are taken from Psalm 89, and are traditionally spoken at a coronation service, reminding us that the administration of justice is the prerogative of the Crown. William Schuman's *Declaration Chorale* followed, setting to music passages he had selected from poetry by Walt Whitman. A composition by Amy F. Bernon took ancient Hebrew texts that stated "On these three things the whole world stands", which she used in her title, *On Justice, Truth and Peace*.

The next three-piece set from the late Renaissance comprised two works by Alessandro Scarlatti—*Justitiae Domini* (the statues of the Lord) and *Exsurge, Domine* (Arise, O Lord), bracketing a version of *Justitiae Domini* by Palestrina. This beautiful music is very easy on the ear, or as **George Yeh** from Substack commented "this set formed the concert's most mellifluous sonic 'warm bath'".

One of the highlights of the concert ended the first half. This was the new composition and world premiere,



*Melissa and Philip with Mark and Suzanne Haubein.*

*Suite Justice* by former composer-in-residence **Melissa Dunphy** who was present for the performance. The piece was commissioned by the Haubein family in honor of **Suzanne Ramsey Haubein**, a former SLCC singer. Melissa wrote the Suite with four movements: *Voice* (text by Zona Gale), *Our Country* (Anna Louise Strong), *Novus ordo seclorum* (Vergil), and *Youth* (Langston Hughes.)

The second half began with *Oráculo* by José Antônio de Almeida Prado from Brazil, two pieces on Justice by James MacMillan and Peter Tchaikowsky, and *A Lincoln Letter*, written by Abraham Lincoln to a mother after losing five sons in battle, and set to music by Ulysses S. Kay.

A two-piece set followed, first *MLK*, written as a lullaby by U2 and arranged by Bob Chilcott, and *There is a Balm in Gilead*, arranged by William Levi Dawson.

The concert ended with *The Time Has Come*, a composition by Ēriks Ešēvalds who selected passages from Nelson Mandela's inaugural address as South Africa's president in 1994. We look forward to meeting Ešēvalds in person next season, when he will travel from Latvia to St. Louis with a new commission!

**Gill Waltman**

## Passions CD Review

The following review of our newest CD appeared in the May/June 2026 issue of *American Record Guide*.

"In this anthology, the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus 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. One of them is England's Francis Pott (b. 1957) whose 6 *Ardor Amoris* settings of poems by Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson,

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and others are interspersed through the program.

Accompanied by evocative writing for the piano, the singers depict love as (among other things) a summer's day, an ethereal dream, and a wild night at sea. There's impressive music from others too, especially Marten Jansson's *Tonight I Dance Alone*, which moves gracefully and lovingly through a series of 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."

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