



VOICEMAIL

May 2015

SLCC cited in Post-Dispatch Annual Go Awards

In the recent annual GO awards from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus received an award for the **Most Creative [Choral] Ensemble**. It was also gratifying that **Artistic Director Philip Barnes** received the award for **Best Program Notes**.

These awards represent the best of St. Louis in all kinds of categories, many of which are in entertainment, but also in restaurants and other things; the list can be found online and includes a surprising range. Below are the citations.

Every member of the St. Louis Chamber Chorus is a paid professional, but it's doubtful that any of them are there strictly for the paycheck. The real draw is the chance to sing in the region's best a cappella choir, with a spectacularly eclectic repertoire. Artistic director Philip Barnes seeks and finds interesting and worthwhile works from around the world and around the centuries, and commissions some of today's best choral composers, for some of the most creative and satisfying concerts anywhere.
SBM

Some musical organizations have program notes written by independent contractors who don't necessarily know the thinking behind the programming. Philip Barnes, artistic director of the St. Louis Chamber Chorus, writes his own, and they are works of accessible scholarship, composed as thoughtfully as are the seasons he builds each year. You don't have to read the notes to enjoy the music, but you'll get a lot more out of the programming if you do. **SBM**

Kudos to the Chorus and its talented Artistic Director:

In this issue:

SLCC cited in Post-Dispatch Annual Go Awards

Message from the President

Meet the Singers – Ryan Bolinger

Meet the Singers – Debbie Banashek-Twist

Renewing the Past: SLCC Celebrates its Jubilee

Perfect Pitch – Blessing or Bane

After Concert Refreshments

After today's concert, join us for food and drinks at West End Grill & Pub, 354 N. Boyle Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63108. If you haven't already joined us for one of our after-concert events, this is the perfect opportunity to meet and enjoy the company of the singers and SLCC personnel. Simply tell your server that you are with the Chamber Chorus, and a portion of your check will be donated to the SLCC.

The Saint Louis Chamber Chorus

PO Box 11588
Clayton, MO 63105
(636) 458-4343
www.chamberchorus.org

Message from the President

The 59th Season has flown by. We were excited to present six concerts in a variety of interesting venues all across St. Louis. Our 60th Season, *Renewing the Past*, should be even more exciting and fun both for you, our audience, and for our singers. In addition to our concerts, we will share several opportunities to get together and celebrate this major milestone together.

We will perform six concerts in six different venues again next season. Each concert will include one Renaissance classic, one modern masterwork and one work commissioned especially by members of our St. Louis audience for you and for our singers, together with other pieces designed to complement the main works. The composers of the newly commissioned work include **Melissa Dunphy, Gabriel Jackson, Yakov Gubanov, Clare Maclean, Steven Stucky** and **Sasha Johnson Manning**.

Our 60th Season also includes two new highlights. You can look forward to our new CD in the Fall, which we expect to be ready in time for your holiday season. Equally exciting (particularly for our singers), the Chorus will perform in Kansas City this Fall as part of our outreach program. We also hope to complete arrangements soon for the Chorus to sing in Chicago next Spring. The new CD and the concerts on the road present new levels of opportunities for the singers to share what you have enjoyed for years in St. Louis with new and broader audiences. Please join us throughout our 60th Season, and help us celebrate this wonderful St. Louis institution.

Dick Brickson

Meet the Singers — Ryan Bolinger

Ryan Bolinger began his musical journey in life at the age of 4 with piano lessons. Ryan was inspired by his mother and maternal grandfather, who were both pianists and educators. He continued playing piano throughout his teen years until he decided to play trumpet like his uncles. He played both instruments through college, where he earned his Bachelor's in music education and piano performance at Southeast Missouri State. While at Southeast, Ryan held a piano studio for 7 years and was choir director at Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Shrine in Perryville, MO.



Ryan Bolinger

After college, Ryan decided to start composing music, prompting him to pursue and earn a Masters in Music Composition from Webster University. He has studied with **James Sifferman, Robert Fruehwald, Paul Alberts, Bob Chamberlin, Kendall Stallings,** and **Kim Portnoy**.

During his early adult years, Ryan was an educator, composer, and performer at schools and churches. He taught at John Burroughs School for 3 years which is where he met **Philip Barnes** and where he was

commissioned to write a piece for the school's choir trip to Austria. The composition *In a Garden* was performed in Vienna and Salzburg.

Ryan then moved to New York to be a music director at an area theater. After spending almost a year in New York, Ryan came back home to St. Louis and is now the Director of Music Ministry at St. Peter Catholic Church in Kirkwood. Here, Ryan enjoys working with both an adult and a children's choir. When not at St. Peter, he continues to do performances in the St. Louis area for music theater,

school concerts, and competitions. Ryan also maintains a strong desire to compose music, writing arrangements for schools and churches.

In Ryan's brief ten-year career since graduating from college, he has so far composed over 30 pieces and arranged 20 others. He is currently writing original compositions for competitions and commissions. He is also in demand as an accompanist and music director.

Despite this impressive schedule, Ryan and his fiancée **Tracy Hensz**, a travel accountant for Maritz, plan to get married this June!

Meet the Singers — Debbie Banashek-Twist

Debbie has loved music and singing for as long as she can remember. Her father always played classical music in the house, and in 3rd or 4th grade she discovered community theatre. In junior high school she attended summer choir camps at the Universities of Illinois and Kansas which exposed her to a wide variety of choral music for the first time, and she became actively involved in several choirs and musical theatre productions throughout high school, briefly taking voice lessons from **Margaret Campbell**.



Debbie Banashek-Twist

Debbie has now been part of four SLCC recordings, including the work this past February. Last summer, she sang with **Andy Jensen** (SLCC member and music professor at Southwestern Illinois College) in his summer concert in Belleville, Illinois, and will join him again for the 2015 summer concert, *Shakespeare in Song*. She sings in the choir for the High Holy Days at Shaare Emeth Congregation. Having regretted not singing in church growing up like so many of her musical peers, she says it is a true joy to sing spiritual music at her own temple.

While attending Miami University of Ohio as a business-turned-English Education major, Debbie was a member of Choraliers (an all-women's ensemble) for four years under the direction of **Ron Matson**. They toured regionally and performed with the Cincinnati Ballet as well as the Illinois Philharmonic (her first time singing *Carmina Burana*—still one of her favorite works ever!)

After graduation in 1993, Debbie started teaching high school English at Valley Park. Since then she has taught at 7 high schools in cities in 4 states: Boston, Seattle, Des Moines, and St. Louis. She has taught English at Parkway North High School for the past 9 years, and in 2011 she became Parkway's first National Board Certified English teacher.

Debbie first sang with SLCC in the 1997-1998 season. She auditioned on a whim and was thrilled when Philip offered her an alternate position. She sang on the *Spanish Christmas* CD that season, her first recording ever. In 1998, she moved to Boston and then to Seattle, joining the Bellevue Chamber Chorus. Back in St. Louis in 2006, she happily rejoined the SLCC. She also briefly sang with the American Chamber Chorale under **Steven Morton**.

At her 20th high school reunion Debbie met up with former class mate, **John Twist**; they will celebrate their fifth anniversary this summer. Debbie also has two sons, Josh (13) and Parker (10), who attend Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School where she is an active parent. Work, family and singing keep her busy, but in her free time, she enjoys riding with John, an avid cyclist.

Renewing the Past: SLCC Celebrates its Jubilee

A 60th birthday is always something to celebrate, and to do so we have an unusually rich diet of music planned, one that blends the best of the old and the new and demonstrates the remarkable agility of these musicians. They will be asked to present acknowledged masterpieces by Brahms, Copland, and Ildebrando Pizzetti, alongside new challenges from six composers commissioned to write specifically for our choir. Four of the six have been, or are, our 'Composers-in-Residence,' while the fifth is a new, outstanding British composer, and the sixth recently won the Pulitzer Prize for music.

In one concert, the singers will survey sacred music from an array of faiths, reaching beyond Jewish and Christian traditions to Hindu and Buddhist, ancient Egyptian and Greek. Our November concert will prove especially 'noteworthy' when we present *Spem In Alium*, an extraordinary motet written for forty voice parts by the great Tudor court musician, Thomas Tallis. Even in an age when much repertoire is available on disc or the web, this new season will feature music that is simply unavailable elsewhere: it should serve as a reminder of the unique gift this choir offers us in St. Louis, and its reach to new composers living as far afield as Australia and Europe will demonstrate that the Chamber Chorus is no parochial undertaking. From the first concert in September to the finale in May of this Jubilee year you will hear some extraordinary vocal music, beautiful, poignant and stirring.

Perfect Pitch – Blessing or Bane



Perfect Pitchers. Photo: Bill Bascom.
From left: Charlie Grames, Martha Shaffer and Deane Thompson.

Perfect pitch occurs in about 1 in 10,000 people. People who have perfect pitch have a normal auditory system. Their special ability is to instantly recognize and name tonal frequencies—individual tones, all tones in a multi-note chord. This ability is usually acquired as a child. Perfect pitch can't be learned as an adult—ear-training courses help, but it requires constant practice, where if the skill comes at an early age, it remains an innate part of memory.

There are three people who have had long associations with the Chamber Chorus who have perfect pitch: **Charlie Grames, Deane Thompson,** and myself. We all come from families for whom listening to and performing good music was a high priority. We all took piano lessons and sang with family members and choirs as we grew up. Deane's mother discovered his perfect pitch when he was six, my mother learned about mine when I was four. Charlie's piano teacher realized his talent when he was fourteen.

Here's how it works: When you read, your mind "looks" at a word and instantly recognizes the vowel and consonant sounds represented on the printed page. With pitch memory, you look at note placement on the staff, look for key signature and accidentals, and hear and sing the correct pitch.

The Blessings

Charlie: "Being able to start a piece without a pitch and feel confident that I will be in the correct key when the accompaniment enters is pretty cool."

Deane: "Having perfect pitch has always helped me in sight-reading. I see the notes and know what pitch to sing."

Martha: "Because I know what the notes sound like by looking at the printed page, I can sight-read pieces as the chamber chorus sight-reads and still know when there are mistakes."

The Banes

Sigh. If the conductor decides to perform a piece in a different key, we all have to sight transpose note by note to the new key. Singing in a group when the pitch goes flat is problematic—there's no choice but to blend in while trying to influence singers back to the correct key. And there is an expectation that our own performances will always be "perfect" in pitch.

Summary

Martha: "Perfect pitch is part of my life."

Charlie: "I can't imagine being without it."

Deane: "Having perfect pitch has been a blessing for me."

Martha Shaffer

For more information about
concerts, tickets or auditions:

PO Box 11588, Clayton, MO 63105
(636) 458-4343
www.chamberchorus.org

Graphic Designer, Amanda Verbeck
Cover Photo, William A. Bascom

Advance Ticket Purchases:

Buy tickets online at our website
www.chamberchorus.org

or contact
Linda Ryder, SLCC Exec. Director
(636) 458-4343

For questions, comments or
to submit ideas/articles for
VoiceMail newsletter:

Gill Waltman, Editor
(314) 941-4455
grh@slu.edu