



# VOICEMAIL



## SWEDISH CHRISTMAS SHOWCASES MÅRTEN JANSSON

The SLCC Christmas concert took place on Dec 21 in the beautiful setting of Our Lady of Sorrows. **Philip Barnes** traditionally selects a particular country as his theme for the repertoire, compiling its best music for the holiday season and highlighting a cross-section of its composers. A Swedish Christmas was chosen in honor of our composer-in-residence **Mårten Jansson** whose beautiful compositions dominated the performance.



As the Chamber Chorus has been cautiously able to resume live performances, this was planned to be a very festive occasion with our composer-in-residence present for two world premieres of his work. These were the *Luciasvit* commission and Jansson's delightful new compendium of Christmas carols. Unfortunately, Covid-19 does not understand the concept of best-laid plans, and Jansson was unable to travel during December due to international restrictions.

Despite his palpable absence, the concert featured not only this talented composer's two new SLCC commissions, but the concert was structured around Jansson's *Missa Popularis*. This mass was composed in 2015 for a Polish girls' choir and rearranged for all voice parts the next year for a British choir. It has since been performed by several European and American choirs – but not this one! This was, in part, because it included musical instruments – but this season's theme of collaborations made it an appealing addition to the SLCC repertoire.

The instrumental accompaniment for the performance was provided by the acclaimed Perseid Quartet. The program alternated the elements of the mass from the Kyrie to the Agnus Dei with compositions by other Swedish composers including **Jan Sandström**, **Valborg Aulin** (a woman composer born in 1860 – with a career ahead of her time) and **Fredrik Sixten**.

Jansson's inspiration for each movement of the mass came from Swedish folk music he was familiar with from his youth. He let the text lead him to write sometimes cheerful sounds to solemn words. The *Luciasvit* is a cycle of four traditional carols in three movements (the first combines two carols) celebrating Sankta Lucia whose feast day is December 13. The collection of Christmas carols called *Mammas Bästa* ("momma's favorites") was based on four different authors of Swedish folk lore writing mostly for children. All beautifully set to music in Jansson's charming and inimitable style.

**Gill Waltman**

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## WELCOME TO *THE DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES*

Today we celebrate love with Brahms, Elgar, Hagenberg and (one of my favorites) Morten Lauridsen. Love can captivate you, capture your heart and consume your attention. Being infected by the “love bug” may be cute (and even enduring). On the other hand, being infected by the other bug that still looms around us these days is less endearing. We can all hope it will either go away or become so manageable that we can work around it.

This year, we have taken steps to try to protect you in the audience from that other bug. In addition, you should know that we have taken several steps and precautions to protect our singers and accompanist throughout this season. Our goal was to reassure the singers and give them as safe an environment as we could.

For example, at the start of the season, we moved our Monday rehearsals to Ursuline Academy which gave

us two separate spaces in which to rehearse, so that we could keep the rehearsal time in any one space to 90 minutes – first in the music room and second in the chapel. In addition, we bought high quality air filters for the rehearsals, and we take photos at each rehearsal to help us operate a modified “track and trace” system. Each singer agreed to be fully vaccinated and boosted, and each wears a mask in rehearsals and in performances – some use special masks designed specifically for singers, and some use a unique “frame” inside their regular masks. Nothing is perfect, but we are trying to do the right things for our singers.

I would like to specifically thank Ursuline Academy for welcoming us to its campus – this arrangement has been very helpful and very supportive. Thank you!

**Dick Brickson**

## NICK RHODES – SINGER HIGHLIGHT



Nick Rhodes currently sings Tenor I in the Chorus and although he has developed a deep love and appreciation for classical music, he says that his musical interests did not start there.

He grew up in rural Red Bud, Illinois and when he was in grade school, his parents gave him a guitar and a Mel

Bay chord book. Shortly after that he learned to play and sing classic rock and folk songs introduced to him by his parents, whom he describes as having fantastic taste in, and an appreciation for, music. In early high school, Nick started playing gigs locally as a solo or duo acoustic act and for years, played nearly every weekend with various groups.

Nick accidentally fell in love with classical music when he began his college studies at Southwestern Illinois College in Belleville. He entered as a science major with the thought of potentially attending medical school but enrolled in choir as an elective. That's where Nick met **Andy Jensen**, the choral director at SWIC, and current singer and assistant conductor with SLCC. Under his direction, Nick was exposed to a genre of music with no prior experience - choral music. The following year, Nick changed his major to Choral Music Education.

After completing his studies at SWIC, Nick transferred to Webster University in St. Louis to continue pursuing his degree. He studied under **Trent Patterson**, **Carole Gaspar**, and **Jacob Lassetter**. Nick participated in countless

fulfilling performances both as a soloist and with various choral ensembles. As a member of the Webster University Chamber Singers, he took part in several recruitment tours around the country. During one of these tours, this group was hired to be the backing choir for **Josh Groban** on a handful of his concerts. Due to an annual residency program, Nick was privileged to study with world famous soprano, **Christine Brewer**. In his junior year, he participated in a choral performance at Carnegie Hall.

Nick graduated from Webster University and transitioned into the Grand Center Arts Academy where he had been student teaching. He teaches high school choir, music theory, music history and music technology, and also organizes an after-school band which performs popular music. In 2019, Nick joined the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus - a personal goal since he started studying classical music.

When not working, Nick hones his contemporary music skills by continuing to play shows most weekends. For several years, he was in a touring rock band called The Monolithic where he played guitar and sang while improving his songwriting and performance skills. Nick says, “although exhausting, getting to record and share my music with others around the country provided an extremely rewarding artistic outlet.”

Nick currently lives in Belleville with his wonderful wife Lindsie, their daughter Elise (9), and son Liam (7). “Together, we enjoy eating copious amounts of delicious food, playing with our cats Ziggy and Zoey (though I still identify as a dog person), and spending time with our extended family.”

**Gill Waltman**



## HEATHER FEHL – SINGER HIGHLIGHT



Heather was born and raised in the St. Louis area and went to Fox High School in Arnold. Her love of music began as a young child at church where her mother sang in the choir. “As I got older, we would pick up my grandpa on the way to church and sit together. He sang bass, my mom sang alto, and I would be singing the melody. We always got some interesting looks during the hymns.”

Heather always enjoyed singing in small groups at church and then in various choirs throughout high school. Her love of music led her to be involved in many school musicals as a young child as well as in local community theaters. In high school she played Annie Oakley in *Annie Get Your Gun*. In community theater productions she has played everything from a witch (*Into the Woods* and *Wizard of Oz*) to a wardrobe (*Beauty and the Beast*). She also played Ester in *Meet Me in St. Louis* and sang many times in various choruses. Now that she’s been taking tap for a few years she also performed in the dance chorus of *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*.

Heather earned a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Music Performance from Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois.

College allowed her the opportunity to travel around the Midwest as well as travel abroad to Ireland and Scotland with the University Choir and to sing at many of the fabulous cathedrals of those countries. She loved Dublin and its old architecture.

After graduation from college, Heather sang with the St. Louis Symphony Chorus where her voice teacher **Sarah Price** suggested she audition for the Chamber Chorus. She joined the 2012-2013 season and has been singing soprano with SLCC ever since.

Heather currently works for an insurance company with its own corporate band. “Although we have taken a break due to Covid, our corporate band performs at the annual Battle of the Corporate Bands to raise money for United Way.” In the past, the band has also sung during the Komen Race for the Cure Run, the Dragon Boat Races, and the biggest highlight was opening for **Kenny Loggins** at a corporate 75th Anniversary event. Several other highlights that singing has brought Heather were to perform at Carnegie Hall, sing Happy Birthday for **Julie Andrews** as well as sing backup with SLCC for **Barry Manilow**.

“When I am not singing, I spend time with my dog Meeko, who is a six-year-old Wheaton terrier. I am still enjoying tap classes and working on my 40-by-40 bucket list.”

**Gill Waltman**

## St. Louis Classical Guitar pays Tribute



The brand-new work *A Spiritual Musick* by **Sasha Johnson Manning** performed at our November concert was unique for several reasons, most notably because its commissioner John Clayton had arranged it in anticipation of his own passing. John knew that he would not live to hear the premiere, but he was intent on its creation as a tribute and celebration of his wife, **Jill Clayton**. He met his bride through our concerts – Jill is a wonderful soprano – and he remained a huge fan of the choir until his death.

Another organization that was close to his heart was St. Louis Classical Guitar, for whom he created and

presented a weekly radio show on St. Louis’s classical radio station. Some members were eager to join us in a joint tribute to John, so as an encore the Chorus and guitarists led by **W. Mark Akin** combined to present “They Shall Grow Not Old,” also by Sasha.

Such a venture seemed fitting not only for the occasion, but also in a season built upon musical collaborations. John, who as a radio host loved to bring together musicians of all stripes, would surely have approved.

**Philip Barnes**

# NOTEWORTHY NOTES

## MORE COLLABORATIONS

The November 14 concert *We Will Remember Them* was held at Third Baptist Church in Grand Center close to Veteran's Day, formerly Armistice Day and was a time to commemorate accumulative losses including recent ones from the pandemic. We were fortunate to hear the *Requiem* by **Gabriel Fauré** at this concert as well as other moving pieces by **Mendelssohn**, **Brahms** and others. Notably, it included the world premiere and SLCC commission, *A Spiritual Musick*, by **Sasha Johnson Manning**. (See previous page.)



The Chorus members were accompanied by SLCC's talented pianist **Diana Umali**, whose performance at the October concert was memorable. There were several pieces in the performance written for organ accompaniment and this was provided by a combination of the impressive pipe organ at Third Baptist and the gifted organist **Andy Peters**.

Andy had accepted an offer to move to Denver (leaving the next day!) and postponed his departure to perform with the Chorus. The organ has an interesting provenance (see article on this page) and combining its lusty pipes with Andy's renditions was an unusual and thrilling addition to the familiar *a cappella* format.

Most older organ pipes and consoles are fixed and situated at the side of the church, often heard but not seen. This console is 'portable' allowing the organist to play facing the choir with his back to the audience providing a new experience for some of us to view the many keyboards and organ stops in use, but to become particularly spellbound by the choreography of the organist's feet on the pedal keyboard!

**Gill Waltman**



Jill and John Clayton on the occasion of their 10th wedding anniversary.

## HISTORY OF THE ORGAN AT THIRD BAPTIST

According to organist **Brent Johnson** (see highlight in May 2021 VoiceMail), the organ of Third Baptist is one of the largest in the city of St. Louis. It's certainly one of the most complete with 72 ranks (or individual sets) of pipes for a total of 4945 pipes. In 2012 the Reuter organ company of Lawrence, Kansas built what was essentially a new pipe organ for the church utilizing all of the old pipes plus 12 more new and vintage ranks from other organs. The organ's four manual keyboards and pedal keyboard allow the organist to control the pipes located in two large chambers on either side of the chancel, and one smaller one in the ceiling of the rear of the church.

Some of the pipes in the ceiling appear to date from 1920 when the first Kilgen organ was installed in the church. That organ was the largest in St. Louis when it was new but was mostly destroyed by fire in 1928. The genesis of this current instrument was installed in 1930. One electronic addition was made in 2018 in the form of a Harp stop. There are also two sets of chimes (tubular bells), one in the front and one in the rear. A curious addition is a Tibia stop that once accompanied silent movies in the St. Louis Theatre, now known as Powell Hall.

Brent says that it's hard to put an age statement on the organ because it has pipes from 1920, 1930, 1949, and 2012. The moveable console is very common today. The console is attached to the pipe chambers via a very thin network cable. Originally the console was powered by air, so it was stuck in place by the hard airlines.

### For more information about concerts, tickets or auditions:

PO Box 11558, Clayton, MO 63105  
info@chamberchorus.org  
(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