



# VOICEMAIL



## Ronald Arnatt – Where It All Began



As we anticipate our 70th season, it's worth reflecting that this choir's longevity was not a foregone conclusion. Back in 1956 it was conceived as a new vehicle for important chamber works in the choral canon, introducing St. Louisans to unfamiliar works by Copland, Stravinsky, and Vaughan Williams – to name just three composers of that time.

The Bach Society was clearly devoted to Bach, the recently founded Cosmopolitan Singers were 150-strong and better suited to large-scale works, while the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra had no chorus at all!

Enter the young organist and choirmaster of Christ Church Cathedral, **Ronald Arnatt**, who had emigrated from England after the Second World War, and who was bursting with energy, talent, and ambition. He had sung as a boy in the choir of Westminster Abbey, and his subsequent training through Trinity College of Music (in London) and then Durham University gave him the formal education expected of a cathedral musician. Gathering some of the city's finest musicians, he formed the Saint Louis Chamber Orchestra & Chorus and gave its first performance at Holy Communion Episcopal Church, in University City.

In its early years, as Arnatt later remarked to Philip Barnes, the organization lived very hand-to-mouth, with some programs being put together on very limited resources. But gradually the group prospered, and by the time Arnatt left in the late 1970s, it was very much a fixture on the local music scene. Money, though, was always a challenge, and some time into the leadership of **Allen Carl Larson**, the funds needed for the orchestra dried up.

Despite this setback, the singers were intent on carrying on, which is precisely what they did under the next conductor, **Stephen Curtis**. They kept the title 'Chorus' rather than 'Choir' as a reminder of those Arnatt days, and this is the group that selected **Philip Barnes** as its fourth Artistic Director some years later. Since his appointment, the ensemble has specialized in a *cappella* repertoire, developing further its reputation for adventurous programming, advocating for women composers and new works in general, and demonstrating all-round excellence in performance.

As it reaches seventy years of music-making, we can be sure that Dr. Arnatt would have been both gratified and not a little amazed that his vision continues to delight and inspire St. Louis singers and audiences. And our growing discography ensures that Arnatt's legacy may be appreciated around the globe through CDs and now streaming and downloads.

**Philip Barnes**

### EXTENSIVE REPERTOIRE ON SLCC WEBSITE

We invite you to peruse the extensive repertoire pages on the SLCC website which catalogs around 1750 works that the ensemble has performed over the past 69 years. Paper records in the form of concert programs for our first three decades, under Ronald Arnatt and Allen Carl Larson, are incomplete. Ongoing research through newspaper archives and individual reminiscences has allowed us to fill some of the gaps in our formative years with some recent valuable clarifications. Take a look and please let us know if you have any of these missing programs!

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SAINT LOUIS  
CHAMBER  
CHORUS

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT - WELCOME TO OUR 70TH SEASON!

We are busy preparing for the upcoming 70th season and look forward to offering you several new features.

**Locations you love.** Each season we invite you to explore some of the most interesting venues for music in the St. Louis area. Last year, we took you to venues that were all new to this Chorus. In the coming season, we will perform in many of the places you have enjoyed with us in the past, plus one concert at a new location (for us)!

In October, we will sing at Third Baptist Church, a venue we have all enjoyed at previous concerts. In November, we will sing at the Lutheran Church of the Atonement in Florissant. In December, we invite you to join us at St. Louis Abbey, a favorite venue for the singers and the audience.

In February, we will perform for the first time in Salem United Methodist Church, located in a lovely setting at the junction of Lindbergh Blvd and Highway 64/40. In

April, we return to Christ Church Cathedral in St. Louis. Finally, in May, we are excited to invite you back to the Link Auditorium in the Central West End.

**Advance Helpful Information.** In response to great suggestions from audience members, helpful information will be posted in advance on our website such as directions to the venue, restroom availability, and parking.

**Seat Cushions You Will Love.** Some of our venues offer luxurious, comfortable seating, but others may not be as comfortable. See our exciting offer of plush, handsome, monogrammed seat cushions that you can bring to each concert. (See more on page 4.)

**Receptions.** Two receptions for your benefit are in the planning stages to be held either at intermission or after a concert. Look for updates.

**Dick Brickson**

## PEARL WILSON - DOCUMENTARY AND LIFESTYLE PHOTOGRAPHER



"As cliché as it may sound, I really love photos. I love taking them, looking at them, putting them together in a book, framing them, and just everything about them! Photography has become a true therapy for me and fills my soul."

As a child, Pearl Wilson moved around a lot. Her parents divorced when she was five and she never felt she had a home that felt like home. After

learning there would be no help from her parents for college, she joined the Missouri Air National Guard to pay for tuition. Then she enrolled at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and received a Bachelor's Degree of Studio Art with an emphasis in Graphic Design and Photography.

"My photography courses were so much fun for me and I would lose all sense of time either photographing or processing film in the dark room. There was something so special and romantic about photography, but at that time I felt like I should focus on graphic design as my career." She spent a few years after college doing graphic design work at a few Kansas City advertising agencies before eventually starting her own photography business.

Pearl didn't realize her full passion for photography until she had her kids, and her obsession for documenting their life began. She fell in love with photography through the constant practice of photographing her family and wanted to learn more and more. In 2010 a neighbor asked her to take some family photos.

"This blew my mind since I wasn't a 'professional photographer' but despite my explanations that I only did photography for my family, she persisted saying how she loves all of my personal photos on Facebook and urged me to give it a try. After a lot of thought, I did the session and couldn't believe how much I lost myself in it, just like the darkroom days in college." Slowly over time, Pearl developed her photography business.

Pearl says that her style toggles between documentary and lifestyle. Documentary is completely unguided and lifestyle is a little guided with minimal posing. She loves how artful unscripted moments can be and how a beautiful moment frozen in time can tell a particular story.

Pearl loves photographing primarily weddings and families because of the never-ending unscripted moments that unfold in front of her either during a wedding day or a family session. "It truly is soul-filling to capture the small and tender moments in an artistic way - photographic moments that I know they will cherish for a lifetime."

In recent years, Pearl has been photographing the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus. "Listening to the Chorus sing while I get to take pictures is such a privilege. I love the way I can capture the drama in their music through photos. It always moves me seeing the photos I took from a concert come together. I can just hear the music as I look at the final set of images."

Pearl lives in Defiance, Missouri with her husband, two teenagers and two labradors with never a dull moment! "I never stop evaluating the light around me. Seeing how the light is hitting and the shadows it is creating. Always with my camera close by to capture a moment."

**Gill Waltman**

## MARIA GRANILLO - NEW COMPOSER-IN-RESIDENCE



Coinciding with our 'Platinum Anniversary' we also celebrate the appointment of a new Composer-in-Residence, the seventh artist to occupy that role in our history, and now supported by a generous grant from the E. Reuben and Gladys Flora Grant Foundation.

The distinguished Mexican composer, **Maria Granillo**, has accepted the invitation to write works specifically for us over the next three years.

Though now well-established on the faculty of her alma mater, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, Professor Granillo's training took her far from her homeland. After graduate studies in England, first at the Guildhall School of Music in London, and then at York University, she earned a doctorate from the University of British Columbia.

Our Residency program was conceived as an opportunity to add to the wider choral repertoire through works specifically written with us in mind. We could stimulate and educate our singers and listeners alike through the musical imagination of artists from different traditions, and as a bonus we would introduce composers around the globe to the creativity nurtured by our city. Composers of Dr. Granillo's caliber are never

short of commissions, but what our program ensures is that her creative energy is directed towards choral music in particular, and thus we enrich the wider choral repertoire. Proof of this may be seen in the many repeat performances that works by this Chorus have received beyond St. Louis, by choirs far and near.

Regulars to Chamber Chorus concerts may recall Granillo's song cycle "Marinas" from two seasons ago. We might anticipate some of its infectious melodies and rhythmic intensity in her first commission for us, one of the choral odes from Sophocles's "Antigone," translated by **Philip Barnes**. It will be featured in our season finale next May.

During an extensive career, María Granillo has written in most musical genres, accompanying dramatic presentations in the theater and opera house, as well as composing movie scores. She has also created original works for a variety of instrumental ensembles, ranging from solo instruments to full symphony orchestra, some of which are readily accessible on YouTube. However, one area where her output is limited in size is choral music, and we intend to redress that imbalance in the next three years. It will be fascinating to see how Professor Granillo responds to this opportunity to write for a choir of the caliber of the Chamber Chorus.

**Philip Barnes**

(Visit [mariagranillo.com](http://mariagranillo.com) to sample many of her other works.)

## Review of Concert 6 – War and Peace

Following our season finale in May, we heard from Karl Weigl, who was delighted to hear works by his grandmother, Vally. We've agreed to share our archival recording with The Weigl Foundation, thus encouraging other choir directors to add Vally's music to their repertoire. This is but a small way the Chorus fulfills its educational mission. No such promotion was needed for two other works on May's program, the cantatas for war and for peace by Darius Milhaud, since they are already available on commercial recordings. Prior to our concert, both he and Vally Weigl were the focus of a lengthy article in *The Jewish Light*, which described their escape from the Nazis and subsequent relocation in the USA. Pieces by other composers advocating for peace in the face of authoritarianism complemented the Weigl and Milhaud: our May audience enjoyed music by the Brazilian composer, Heitor Villa-Lobos and the Hungarian, Zoltán Kodály.

Three other features of this concert were familiar to regular Chamber Chorus supporters. The choir's appetite for singing the original texts was apparent through the five languages the singers tackled, a feat appreciated by *Substack* critic, George Yeh. Our advocacy for both new music and women composers

was demonstrated with a reprise performance of *Psalms 137*, a lament by the Jews languishing under the Babylonian yoke. It had been written for us, using the original Hebrew, by Clare Maclean. Clare, one of our past Composers-in-Residence, was born in New Zealand, but has spent her professional life teaching in Australia. On hearing our rendition of her music, she commented: "It's a really tender and beautiful performance, I'm so glad to have the recording, and I appreciate you taking the time to do this." [Clare has recently retired from the University of Western Sydney, which should give her more time to compose!]

Finally, reminding ourselves of our English roots thanks to our founder Ronald Arnatt, the Chorus performed several works by British composers. Both war and peace were described by madrigalists Thomas Weelkes, Robert Lucas Pearsall, Edward Elgar, and an old favorite of the choir, Granville Bantock. As an encore and a capstone to the 69th season, Assistant Conductor Orin Johnson led the singers in his own composition, *Oseh Shalom*, a 'blessing of peace.' [His skills as an arranger will be heard again this season, at our November performance.]

**Philip Barnes**

# NOTEWORTHY NOTES

## The Reach of our Recordings

Earlier this year we learned that one of our recordings was selected by the BBC in the UK to introduce a 'listener challenge' on its flagship station, RADIO THREE.

This demonstration of the 'reach' of our recordings is mightily encouraging when we reflect on the hard work and extra time expended on these recordings. Many other choirs simply compile a CD or playlist from their live concert recordings, and while this is better than nothing, it can't match the precision and lack of distractions (remember this when you cough at a concert!) possible in professional recordings.

At such sessions, the engineer has ample time to adjust the microphone layout, which can differ piece by piece, while a producer has the opportunity to focus solely on the sound and the rendition of a work. This often means multiple 'takes' of different sections of that work, with the opportunity afterwards to combine these into a coherent and more perfect whole. To give this process some perspective, it generally takes 3 hours to record satisfactorily 15 minutes of finished sound. As a result, each of our recordings represent four nights of recording that follow months of preparation. Bearing this in mind, most reviewers will not consider recordings that exist only as streaming or a download: thus, we issue physical CDs as well as appearing on Spotify.

With our next recording soon to be released by REGENT, it's worth remembering that our outreach, beyond St. Louis, and often through online blogs and radio stations around the globe, requires an enormous investment by the singers. Please support their efforts by purchasing the discs or downloads as they become available.

**Philip Barnes**

## Farewell to Kerensa – for now!



As we welcome **Maria Granillo** as our new Composer-in-Residence, it's an ideal moment to reflect upon the works that her predecessor, **Kerensa Briggs**, wrote for us, especially as their immediate appeal suggests they will now enter the

repertoire of other choirs, both here and overseas. Kerensa immediately recognized that writing for the Chorus offered her a broader canvas than the conventional choral commission. So, her suite, *Height in Depth*, and more recently her *Missa Brevis*, called for a double choir formation and divisions within each part. Both these pieces are characterized by rich harmonies and elegant melodies often based on plainchant.

In contrast with these large-scale works, when collaborating with the Kansas poet, **Charles Anthony Silvestri**, Kerensa created a delightful miniature using only four voice parts that should thus be accessible to most amateur choirs. This piece, *Seeking You*, offers two alternative texts, one sacred and the other secular, which again makes the piece appealing to choral groups of all stripes. It will be heard on our forthcoming CD, *Saint Louis Passions*, to be released this fall. As happened with her predecessors, we hope Kerensa might continue to write for the Chamber Chorus, building upon the experience she gained during her three years with us.

**Philip Barnes**

## New Plush Cushions for your Seating Pleasure!



**BUY NOW**

Not all the venues where our concerts are held have comfortable seating! What better way to enjoy the region's best *a cappella* chorus than with a **commemorative 70th anniversary** seat cushion. We are pleased to offer these plush, memory foam cushions, monogrammed with the SLCC logo, to our audiences and friends. Bring yours to each venue, especially after a pre-concert heads up from **Philip Barnes** that a bit of extra padding might be appreciated!

For patrons who would like to pre-order seat cushions, they may be purchased online at [chamberchorus.org](http://chamberchorus.org) through Pay PAL and picked up at our first concert at Third Baptist Church on October 5. They will also be available for purchase at the concert for \$20 each. Donors at the Sponsor level (\$1,000 or more) may receive a gift of two cushions.

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