



VOICEMAIL



IMAGINING WHAT MUSIC LOOKS LIKE

When I listen to the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus and its amazing group of singers, I find most of my mental focus is on the sound of the choir in the chosen acoustic space. In the background, I tend to divide my attention in two directions. First the acts of singing and conducting are thrilling to watch in the sense of fine art unfolding before your very eyes. This competes for my attention with my attempt to absorb the lyrics being sung often darting between the original language and its translation. All of this is enhanced by the thoughtful commentary Philip Barnes offers in between major pieces of the program. But this season of pandemic demands a different approach to our experience of the choir and its music.

The decision to focus upon the choir's recordings instead of live music provided an opportunity for Philip and his guests to discuss specific recordings, the composers who write for us, the different aspects of the choir and its history, as well as the different acoustic spaces in which the choir performs. While live song has been all too clearly shown to be a grimly efficient means of spreading this virus, beautifully engineered recordings of the choir can easily mitigate the risks of infection. Holding these musical discussions in the abundant space of the 3rd Baptist Church can fulfill the requirements of social distancing. However, many still prefer to minimize social contact and for this reason, we will offer these concerts as simulcasts to subscribers who desire to engage remotely.

Both my father and I have enjoyed photography throughout our lives. My father edited 16-mm movies of his travels, incorporating titles and music to stage dinner-theater shows for his friends. My own interests center more on still photography but, with the advent of computers and various kinds of software, motion and various special effects can be used to give a bit more life to simple still images. Think of the pioneering use of this kind of effect applied to still photographs by Ken Burns starting with his beautiful documentary of the Civil War.

I was intrigued when Phillip enlisted my help in making visual accompaniments to the recorded selections sung by the choir. This is a reversal of my usual approach in which I have the images I want, and then search for music that supports them. Here, the opposite is the goal - we have the music, so how might it be reflected in accompanying visual images.

So, we will attempt to add elements like these to this unusual concert season. This work-in-progress has a learning curve all its own, but we will invite other photographers to share their images and ideas of what best illustrates this choir's unique musical experience. Above all, it is a challenge of sorts, but that seems appropriate to a choir to whom "challenging" is the musical norm that makes them so very special.

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THE
SAINT LOUIS
CHAMBER
CHORUS



Dan Hanson has been a member of the SLCC Board since 2014. He is a lecturer in immunology at Washington University and an avid photographer.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT **Nothing is Simple!**

As you know, because of the pandemic, we can't sing live concerts yet. However, we can use our concert recordings, friends and other resources to bring you some of our favorite music, tell you the story of the Chorus and give you insights into what we do, how we do it and, most importantly, why we do it. That sounds pretty simple and straightforward, right? Wrong! We have had to deal with unprecedented technical, legal and pragmatic issues.

For example, we commission new music from exciting and upcoming composers each year. We negotiate for the rights we need from the composers and their publishers to perform the music live and to record the new music. But we needed to obtain additional permission to live stream the music and to make it available on podcasts.

Similarly, we faced new and challenging technical demands. We needed to secure the correct audio, visual and broadcasting equipment and rights to record our presentations, amplify them in the live setting and broadcast them seamlessly to listeners at home. All of this called for us to invest new funds, new time, new energy and a lot of care and concern. And then there is the pandemic - facts keep developing, best practices keep evolving and fresh concerns keep arising.

The Chorus would love to be able to perform for you and sing live. Until we can again, we are excited to bring you this new series of programs - it has been complex and challenging. We hope you enjoy it.

Dick Brickson

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN SLCC SINGER - PART II

By Deane Thompson



We hope you enjoyed reading Part I of Deane Thompson's observations and personal experiences from the perspective of former Chorus member. In the July issue Deane described what he thought were the essential characteristics required to sing *a cappella* choral music, often in a foreign language, and to the highest expectations of Artistic Director Philip Barnes.

Here are some more of his thoughts:

Singing in the Original Language: The Chorus performs the music in the original language; therefore, singers must have some experience with the foreign language or be able to learn correct pronunciation from a language coach or from written pronunciations. Personally, I struggled with French and English! Words often needed to be pronounced quickly in the pieces sung in French, and Philip's version of English is different from my Midwestern dialect! Not all syllables are correctly sung with the same dynamics (volume). Which syllable is accented? Hardly ever the last syllable. Philip really noticed when I didn't drop the volume on the last syllable.

Phrasing and Rhythm: Another important practice is "phrasing", something I had to learn the "hard" way after joining the Chorus. Within the prescribed dynamic level, most musical text phrases should be sung with the volume increasing slightly in the middle of the phrase and then decreasing. In written music, the time signature, the shape of the notes and the punctuation indicate to the singer the rhythm of each musical phrase. Often the rhythms of the pieces the Chorus sings are complex and require experience and expertise from the singers.

Enunciating Text: Besides the unique sounds, harmonies and dynamics, most music includes a text. For the audience to hear and understand the text, the words must be clearly enunciated. Chorus singers are adept at enunciating the words while not interrupting the flow of the sound. The singer clearly enunciates by definite and accurate pronunciation of the consonants and using the correct vowel sound. Emphasizing the ending consonant of the last word of a phrase, or where there is a brief pause in a phrase is a great help in the audience understanding the word.

Conducting by the Maestro: One of the many talents Philip brings to the Chorus is his physical conducting of rehearsals and concerts. As conductor, he provides interpretation of the music in terms of tempo, dynamics, phrasing, emphasis and feeling through arm and hand motions and often through facial expressions and body language. The singers are adept at reading Philip's direction with the result that the music comes alive. A well-rehearsed singer, even though singing from the hand-held music, has partially memorized much of each piece so they are able to watch Philip carefully so as to not miss any of his directions that can be crucial at any point.

In my days singing under Philip's direction, I noted that the adrenaline generated by the actual performance or a new thought about the best interpretation of the music might lead him to make changes from rehearsals in his direction of pieces being performed. Perhaps a greater range of dynamics, a change in tempo or emphasis in the words adding intensity or perhaps calming to the music. Chorus singers are alert to those changes by watching carefully and being ready to execute his new directions.

Deane adds that singing in the Chorus from 1982-2005 was one of his greatest life experiences!

SLCC BOARD MEMBER GEORGE DURNELL RETIRES



Many heartfelt thanks to George Durnell who recently retired from the SLCC Board after serving for 26 years.

George was born in New York City and spent his early years in northeastern New Jersey until his father's job brought the family to St. Louis. George graduated from Kirkwood High School in 1966 and attended Hanover College in Hanover, Indiana, majoring in

history. He earned a master's degree in Library School at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. George started work in the Audio-Visual Department at the St. Louis County Library in 1971, holding several different positions, ending up as the Assistant Director. He retired from SLCL in 2007.

George was a singer all his life. He joined the church choir in New Jersey in third grade. He sang in choruses all through school in Kirkwood. At Hanover College, he sang in two choirs: the A Cappella Choir and the Chamber Singers. Back in St. Louis in 1971, George joined the Chancel Choir at the First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood and has sung in that group ever since.

George says he first became aware of the St. Louis Chamber Chorus in the early '70s when founder Ronald Arnatt was still at the helm. He attended concerts when Stephen Curtis and Allan Carl Larson were conducting the Chorus and became a subscriber after Philip Barnes became Artistic Director.

In 1994, SLCC president Larry Stout invited George to join the Board. George immediately agreed and began his long affiliation with the Chamber Chorus. He served as secretary, and succeeded Larry as president, a position he held for ten years. He served on the Recordings and Finance Committees for many years and for quite a while, the Chorus's risers were stored in his garage! George recalls a highlight of his tenure - the celebration of the Chorus's 50th season, which included a gala dinner at Algonquin Country Club.

When Philip mentioned that he wanted to commission a piece from Howard Helvey, a composer born in Missouri who now lived in Cincinnati, George knew he had to offer to sponsor it. His father had lived in Cincinnati before he was married, and later ended up in St. Louis, so it seemed the perfect way to honor his parents. The resulting piece, settings of three poems by St. Louis poet Sara Teasdale, was later published by Oxford University Press. "The day of its premiere performance by the Chamber Chorus remains a vivid - and very happy - memory for me."

Chamber Chorus concerts often provided unexpected excitement beyond the wonderful singing. George remembers a Christmas concert at St. Margaret of Scotland Church in the Shaw neighborhood. With only street parking at the church, and a heavy snowfall the night before the sold-out concert, church parishioners joined members of the Board and other volunteers to help the concertgoers find parking places and helped push cars out of the snow-packed streets after the concert to send our audience safely home.

George has met composers from around the world and formed friendships with the other Board members, many of the singers and subscribers. "The Chamber Chorus has enriched my life more than I can say. But after 26 years, it did seem like it was time to step down."

Away from music, George keeps busy reading. (He was a librarian, after all!) He also designs and stitches needlepoint pillows, and putters around in the kitchen, trying new recipes. "I have been a member of a writing group for over 15 years - we meet every month and write together, and then read what we have written." George has volunteered for six years in the Archives at the Muny in Forest Park, although that particular activity is currently on hold because of the pandemic.

His life partner, Nathan Krueger, is the head of the voice faculty at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. They spend as much time as they can together, either in Oshkosh or St. Louis.

A Popular Adage - Fast Forward!

It's a popular adage that just before you die, your life's achievements flash before you in some crazy form of 'Fast Forward'. While I'm happy to report that I have no intention of quitting this world just yet, I must say that reviewing more than thirty years' of concert recordings with the choir was not a wholly unrelated sensation! Time has an odd knack of both passing very quickly and seeming like an age. Performances that I recall as being only a few years old turn out to belong to another century/millennium! On the other hand, tracking down an old radio broadcast of my very first concert, back in the spring of 1989, belongs to a different life. In other words, the process of putting together our coming season of presentations has been a remarkable experience for me.

While I regret our absence from St. Louis's concert calendar, COVID 19 has forced me to pause, take a breath, and look back over three decades, to realize how much this independent choir has accomplished. When I consider the work of my predecessors, Steven Curtis, Allen Carl Larson, and founder Ronald Arnatt, I am struck by the proud longevity of our Chorus. I am looking forward to sharing many of our achievements with you, and I trust that our new series will only redouble our determination to see the organization through this challenging time.

Philip Barnes

NOTEWORTHY NOTES

ANOTHER RAVE REVIEW

Praise continues to arrive for our latest CD, *St. Louis Premieres*. While the BBC Magazine praised the top notch repertoire and bold singing, even more fulsome praise came from an unexpected corner (for an accompanied choir), The American Organist. Hailing the new release as “impressive, beautiful, and yes, courageous” for its advocacy of new music, the selected works are “imaginative, finely honed, and engaging.” The review continues “The choir is magnificent. Their voices are at once rich and full and then bold and compelling. No textural nor textural challenge is beyond them ... Intonation and blend are superb.”

The reviewer further comments that the chorus “has an enviable record of commissioning new works of both well-established and emerging composers, the current disc composed of eleven such commissions. A particular hallmark of this chorus is its emphasis on the artistry of women composers, four of whom are featured here.”

One comment is of particular interest, revealing a perspicacity not often found in reviews: “Casual listening will not yield the pleasure to be derived by focusing upon colorful, compelling texts, set to music by living composers, and performances that are both commanding and tender.” Clearly, this is a compilation to savor again and again!

With NO prompting from us (!) the reviewer observes that the SLCC “is one of the USA’s most distinguished choirs, ... in addition to providing, through recordings such as this, a rich and stimulating artistic and intellectual experience, the group, by its commissions, gives renewed life to the art of choral music and offers gift after gift of distinguished repertoire to choirs near and far. Vital and vibrant choirs such as this must be treasured and supported, both for their art and also for the enrichment of mind and spirit that they provide.”

And so say all of us! Make sure you have your own copy of this new splendid disc by purchasing online at our website, www.chamberchorus.org

Philip Barnes

A SEASON REIMAGINED!

Season 65 has been reimaged with live discussions between Artistic Director Philip Barnes and other special guests from around the globe and featuring archival recordings of the choir.

Full Season Subscribers have the exclusive right to attend the presentations live. Full Subscribers and Limited Subscribers (who live out-of-town) will have exclusive access to watch the presentations via live streaming from the comfort of their home or as a podcast for the 30 days after the event. Thereafter, we will make the podcasts generally available. This will allow us to share the story of the St. Louis Chamber Chorus with our community and beyond so that others can learn more about our history and the talents of our singers.

Full Season Subscription - \$190

This subscription is for subscribers who live in St. Louis or any of its surrounding counties.

- Attend each presentation in person
- Watch a live stream of each presentation
- Exclusive access to watch a podcast of each presentation during first 30 days
- Receive advanced information about each presentation
- Watch a podcast of each presentation after the first 30 days

Limited Season Subscription - \$150

This subscription is for out-of-town subscribers who will not travel to see a live presentation.

- Watch a live stream of each presentation
- Exclusive access to watch a podcast of each presentation during first 30 days
- Receive advanced information about each presentation
- Receive our most recent CD, “*St. Louis Premieres*”, or another CD of your choice
- Watch a podcast of each presentation after the first 30 days

For more information go to www.chamberchorus.org or call (636) 458-4343.

For more information about concerts, tickets or auditions:

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Advance Ticket Purchases:

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www.chamberchorus.org

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