



VOICEMAIL

May 2010

Letter from England – Part III

The Chamber Chorus is an avowedly mixed organization, from our singers to our directors and board members. We perform music for “mixed voices” which we interpret as meaning “men and women” and our repertoire includes music written by both female and male composers; indeed, our past and present Composers-in-Residence are women.



Norwich Cathedral

None of this attracts much attention, nor should it in an ideal world. But my year in Norwich reminds me that we have not yet attained such a utopia. For all its beautiful music, the Norwich establishment is an anachronism in a changing society. For instance, there are no women priests serving on the cathedral ‘chapter,’ not one woman is employed in the music department, and six of the seven weekly services are sung by boys and men! Since the beginning of the choir year no compositions by women have been performed at a cathedral service.

None of this arises from conscious chauvinism, but rather—I might suggest—a lack of imagination. After all, this has been the way of worship at Norwich for nine hundred years! Yet there is one chink of light in this dark, namely the creation some years ago of a girls’ choir, recruited from both the Cathedral School and other high schools in the city. Under the direction of David Lowe, this group of about twenty teenagers has developed a sound that would be the envy of many a church and it is a musical delight to sing with them, as I do, twice a month. I can only hope their excellence will gradually lead to a greater involvement in the musical life of the Cathedral.

Such a division makes me appreciate the full engagement of both men and women in the Chamber Chorus. We should not take this for granted, but rather protect, nurture and celebrate it.

Philip Barnes
Artistic Director

In this issue:

Letter from England –
Part III

Message from the
President

Concert Preview

Meet the Singers –
Nichole Black

On Composing Choral
Music

Tchaikovsky Vespers

Auditions

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Message from the President

Welcome to today's concert, *Home-Thoughts from Abroad*, the sixth and final concert of our 54th season. We are pleased to welcome home Artistic Director **Philip Barnes** after his sabbatical year abroad and we're delighted to return to Christ Church Cathedral for this concert.

Whether you are a long-time supporter of the St. Louis Chamber Chorus or are attending your first concert, we hope you will take the opportunity to purchase a subscription to our 2010-2011 season, *Progressions—Transitions*, now on sale. As a subscriber you will receive a discount over individual ticket prices as well as reserved seating, preview letters from the Artistic Director, ticket exchange privileges, and the knowledge that you are helping to support St. Louis' premier *a cappella* ensemble.

As this season comes to an end, and on behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to congratulate and thank Assistant Directors **Orin Johnson** and **Mary Chapman** not only for conducting many of the works performed this season but also for leading rehearsals, auditioning prospective singers, and managing numerous other artistic and administrative tasks. The chorus is in a strong position in spite of Philip's absence, and we are grateful to Mary and Orin for their part in making this so. We extend our thanks also to rehearsal accompanist **Martha Shaffer** for her invaluable assistance throughout the year. We are grateful to Executive Director **Linda Ryder** who has managed the business side of the organization with skill and energy. Former singer and current board member **Amanda Verbeck** deserves our thanks for her work on our revised and most attractive website (please visit it at www.chamberchorus.org) and other electronic marketing efforts. Most of all we offer our deepest thanks to the talented and dedicated singers who are the heart of the organization.

I hope to see you at our first concert of the 55th season, on October 3, at the lovely St. Mary of Victories Church, St. Louis' Hungarian Catholic parish, for the program *Transmigration: From Hungary to Hollywood*.

Barbara Uhlemann
SLCC President

Concert Preview

Home-Thoughts from Abroad is certainly a fitting title for this final concert of the 54th Saint Louis Chamber Chorus season. The Chorus revisits its English roots and welcomes back Artistic Director **Philip Barnes** from nearly a year in his native England singing with the Norwich Cathedral Choir.

Forming the heart of the program is the *Mass for five voices* by **William Byrd**, a perfect example of polyphony from the time of Queen Elizabeth I. Interspersed among the Mass's movements are hymns, motets and part-songs exploring the concept of "home." These include **Benjamin Britten's** *Hymn to St. Cecilia*, written as the composer made his way home to wartime Britain,

and **Herbert Howells'** patriotic *Inheritance*. Other music from England includes two settings of **Robert Browning** poetry by **Greville Cooke**, as well the world premiere of *Exaltabo* by **Dr. Magnus Williamson** and commissioned for this concert by the Chamber Chorus.

Of course, "home" means different places for different people. So, the program also features music from far beyond British shores. **Sydney Guillaume** of Haiti offers a prayer for God's presence, certainly a fitting appeal for his homeland amid its recent natural disaster.

Philip Barnes

Meet the Singers — Nichole Black

Nichole Black grew up on her parents' cattle ranch in central Missouri, and has been singing since she was tiny. Her mom loves to tell the story about her first "solo" at church when she was only two—she was so little the only way she could be seen was to stand her on the front pew!

All through high school Nichole was primarily a pianist where she sang in, and accompanied, the high school choirs. She majored in piano at William Jewell College, but changed her major to vocal performance after she had to have wrist surgery. At Jewell, she fell in love with choral singing, thanks to **Dr. Arnold Epley**. To this day, she rarely sings a rehearsal without recalling things she learned from him. Nichole says that learning **Max Reger's** *O Tod, wie bitter bist du* from him her sophomore year was an unforgettable experience, and she was so thrilled to get to sing it again with SLCC this season. In addition to the college choirs, she also sang with him in the Kansas City Symphony Chorus and in Terri Teal's Fine Arts Chorale.



Nichole Black

Nichole got her Master's in Vocal Performance from New England Conservatory in Boston. She focused on opera and art song there. In the summers, she did internships with Opera Theatre of St. Louis and Chautauqua Opera. She says those were incredible experiences, where she learned to put together performances with very little rehearsal time when necessary. Her second summer at Chautauqua she met **Sasha**, an opera coach otherwise known as **Alexander Milshteyn**, to whom she is now married!

After grad school, Nichole moved to New York City to study more opera. Thanks to her husband's job at the 'Met', she saw many operas. Hearing the world's top artists in person week in and week out was a fantastic learning opportunity—she said every night was like a master class! Nichole's favorite memory of the Met was the night she was standing in line backstage to meet **Luciano Pavarotti**, and glanced to her left to see **Cecilia Bartoli** standing right behind her in line. Then when

she met Maestro Pavarotti, she was so nervous she almost passed out!

Nichole figured out that being a full-time opera singer wasn't for her, but she always wanted to sing for fun. In 1999, she and Sasha moved to St. Louis to be closer to her family and because they had chosen St. Louis as the place where they wanted to raise their own family. Their daughter, **Marlena**, is 8, and the family's most recent addition is Layna the dog who, according to Marlena is a "Lopso Apso" (part Shih-Tzu, part Lhasa Apsol!) Nichole says that Marlena has inherited her husband's perfect pitch—and she is so jealous of them both! They love listening to Marlena making up her own compositions on the piano, guitar, and violin.

When Nichole was looking for a fun singing opportunity in St. Louis, she emailed **Sarah Bryan Miller** for advice and was given the impression that the St. Louis Chamber Chorus was the best choral group in town. She auditioned as an alto for **Philip Barnes** and **Martha Shaffer**, and was so tickled to find out that she and Philip

had a Chautauqua connection in common—he had taught voice there.

Nichole says "I love SLCC because I get to do my favorite *a capella* repertoire like Grieg's *Four Psalms*, *Hymn to St. Cecilia*, and the Reger motets we did earlier this season. Plus, we get to learn so many new favorite pieces! My other favorite thing about SLCC is Philip's commentary during rehearsals, plus the way he programs exactly the right pieces for all our beautiful host venues in town."

Nichole is a New Business Analyst at MetLife. She says that for fun outside of more serious music, she likes to play Rock Band with her family, bike, attend Cardinals games, and right now, they are heavily into the TV show *Glee*.

Gill Waltman

On Composing Choral Music

Martha Shaffer is an extremely talented musician and pianist, serves as our rehearsal accompanist and as part of the audition team, but she is also a composer in her own right. Her composition *If Ye Would Hear the Angels Sing* was performed by the Chorus at the *A New World Christmas* concert earlier this year. We asked Martha to write about the composing process and this is how she describes it:

"I start by working with a text that I like, reading it aloud to find the natural rhythm of the words, then singing some melodic phrases that compliment the verbal patterns. The subject matter and historic period of the text often influence my decisions for the style, tempo, and format of the piece. As the melody takes shape, I can hear the supporting harmony in my head. I like to work at the piano, playing the things I hear and writing the ideas into a manuscript notebook. Not every idea makes it to completion—I have several notebooks of unfinished ideas.

If the piece I'm working on has been commissioned, most of the variables are already established. I make sure I know the capabilities of the group that will be performing, so that what I write uses their strengths to ensure an optimal performance. Sometimes I have the additional luxury of knowing the acoustic of the performance venue. After the manuscript draft is finished, I enter the notes into a computer program. The next step is adding the expression and dynamic markings to convey my concept of interpretation to the conductor and singers. Then comes the editing and proof-reading. The play-back feature in the music writing program helps me to find input errors, though the default "voice" sound (like a bad harmonica) makes me anxiously anticipate hearing a live performance!"

Martha Schaffer

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Tchaikovsky Vespers

At the all-Russian concert in February held at Saint Stanilaus Kostka Church, *Benedicta Et Venerabilis* and *Psalms XXVII* by the Russian composer **Yakov Gubanov** were performed, the latter being heard in its world premiere. Professor Gubanov was in St. Louis for the performance.

Visiting Conductor **John Stewart** from Washington University and Assistant Conductor **Mary Chapman** from the Chamber Chorus took turns conducting.



From left: John Stewart, Yakov Gubanov, Mary Chapman and Fr. Marek Bozek after the concert.

Growing up in a musical setting in Russia, Gubanov was familiar with most of Tchaikovsky's works, although he had never heard or seen a performance of the *Vespers*. After the moving performance by the Chamber Chorus that left him misty-eyed, Gubanov commented that not in his wildest dreams did he ever think he would be invited by a man from England (**Philip**) to hear the *Vespers* sung so beautifully in perfect Russian, near the banks of the Mississippi!

Gill Waltman

Auditions

The St. Louis Chamber Chorus seeks experienced singers in all voice parts. Auditions will be from 7 to 9 p.m. June 1, 2, and 3 at Holy Communion Episcopal Church, 7401 Delmar Blvd. Please call (636)458-4343 to schedule your audition.

For more information about concerts, tickets or auditions:

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