



VOICEMAIL



THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Our 69th season opener was a delightful surprise – first the venue, then the program! This season’s theme, *Opposites Attract*, combines the usual magic of the choir’s sound performed in all new concert venues. The first program, *The Sound of Silence*, exemplified this, presented in O’Fallon on the last Sunday in September in the beautiful chapel of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood. One of the most far-flung venues in recent memory, it was well worth the journey to appreciate the architecture of such a gem as described by historian, **Esley Hamilton**, and to experience the selections reverberating in the excellent acoustic. Although a few regulars may have balked at how far they had to travel, several newcomers experienced their first SLCC concert.



IN THIS ISSUE

Message from the President

Singer Highlights

- Stephen Schermitzler

- Madison Jackson

New CD Review by MusicWeb International

Noteworthy Notes

- More CD Reviews

In his review, music critic **George Yeh** found Bairstow’s *Let All Mortal Flesh* “a very effective concert opener, not least with the forte section in the work’s center that showed off the chapel’s acoustic very well.” Other nods to the theme of silence followed, with *May Quietness Descend* by the American, John Schlenck and *Factum Est Silentium* by the Renaissance Italian, Costanzo Porta. Similar tributes to the power of silence came with Max Reger’s *Schweigen*, Vaughan Williams’ *Silence and Music*, and Saint-Saëns’ *Calme des Nuits*. The concert’s first half closed with a past SLCC commission, *Dum Medium Silentium*, by the German composer Wolfram Buchenberg. Barnes held up his hand at the end, Yeh noted, “making the most of the chapel’s acoustic, to let the extended silence sink in.”

The second half opened with the spiritual *Hush!* by the African-American, Stacey V. Gibbs. Two further settings of *Factum Est Silentium* followed, one by the Anglo-Danish composer, Nils Greenhow and the last by the Englishman, Richard Dering, interspersed with *Songs from Silence* by the American composer, Elaine Hagenberg. The program concluded with two arrangements of popular music. *Enjoy the Silence*, by Depeche Mode, arranged by Eric Whitacre; and inevitably, Paul Simon’s classic *The Sound of Silence*, although Reginald Redman’s wistful *All Silent Now* served as an apt encore. George Yeh concluded that “the chapel has an excellent acoustic for choral music, with a very fine balance of resonance and clarity. The SLCC and Mr. Barnes evidently enjoyed performing there, and it showed in the strong performance level, well up to their usual standard.”

THE
SAINT LOUIS
CHAMBER
CHORUS

Message From the President - Welcome to “Classic Pop” at the Sun Theater.

This concert will be a new adventure for you, for me and for our singers. This is the first concert we have ever performed at the Sun Theater. The Theater opened in 1913, closed around 1973 and was restored in 2014. It now serves as the performing arts center for the Grand Center Arts Academy. I toured the venue earlier this year and think you will enjoy both the setting and the acoustics of the Theater.

The music for this concert will also be a very new adventure. Several years ago, the Chorus sang short medleys of songs live with Barry Manilow here in St. Louis. But we have never done a whole concert of popular ballads from recent years. This concert includes music of the Beatles, Coldplay and Taylor Swift, arranged

for a *cappella* choirs. It also includes the premiere of a Nine Inch Nails song arranged specially for us by one of our long-time favorite composers, **Melissa Dunphy**. Melissa is creative, is a joy to work with and will be with us, live, for the concert.

I'll admit that every once in a while, while enjoying the concerts over the years, I wondered what new, popular music would sound like if it were arranged for a chamber chorus like ours – and this will be our chance to hear it. Please enjoy yourselves. And if you are moved to stand up and wave the light on your phone in rhythm with the music, please be careful!

Dick Brickson

STEPHEN SCHERMITZLER



Stephen was born in Phoenix, Arizona. The oldest of five children, Stephen started his musical journey at an early age, learning the piano and singing church music with his parents who both had prominent roles in church life as Pastor and Music Director.

Stephen attributes an early love of music to time spent reading through hymnals and percussion rhythm exercise books on the front porch. His mother, a capable singer, flautist, pianist, and guitarist, heavily invested in his musical development. She connected him with his first teachers, encouraged him to read music over her shoulder, and would often play games of “name that instrument” while listening to classical music in the car.

His formative musical nurture came as a participant of the Phoenix Boys Choir, Desert Bells (international handbell ensemble), and at a local church, playing trumpet and harpsichord in services and producing small vocal ensembles and music directing musical theatre productions. He received his BFA in Music Composition in 2010 from Arizona State University while serving as collaborative pianist for artsong, opera, and musical theatre. After college, he took lessons with Southwest NATS teacher **Thomas Jones**. This led to his participation in many local choirs, among them the Arizona Bach Festival and the Grammy-winning Phoenix Chorale. Stephen has spent several years as a musical freelancer, which helped cultivate a wide knowledge of how music and its ensembles are formed and shaped from conception to performance.

Stephen feels most energized when providing unique and transformative musical experiences to the community. In 2016, he founded, produced, and directed the *Sing Phoenix!* Choral Festival. Local church choirs and instrumentalists engaged in performing the works

of living choral composers, including **Dan Forrest**, **Mark Hayes**, and **Morten Lauridsen**, who flew in as distinguished guests to perform their own works with the mass ensemble.

Stephen discovered his own significant overlap between the classical, choral, and musical theatre communities leading to a new musical creation that is now his life's work: the performance of Broadway shows in classical settings. In 2022, Stephen launched the Arizona Musical Theatre Orchestra: a full community orchestra and symphonic-style chorus uniting with the state's most prolific actors to perform full theatrical shows – dialogue and music – in concert style. Most unique to this concept is the timeframe: over 100 participants prepare their music on their own, joining together for a full rehearsal and performance that takes place over just one weekend. This process is supercharged with excitement, accelerating as musical ingredients combine in a way rarely heard live outside of New York City. Stephen's desire is to expand this concept to include educational opportunities, building a bridge for aspiring Broadway enthusiasts to pursue their dreams and for casual theatre lovers to renew their appreciation for the craft of this uniquely American art form.

Stephen moved to Saint Louis in the summer of 2023 with his partner Ray and two friends with St. Louis connections, which has helped them acclimate. They are grateful for the opportunities to discover more about the city and make new friends.

After finding **Philip Barnes** serendipitously, leading to his engagement in the Chamber Chorus, Stephen says he appreciates its quality of musicianship and networking opportunities. He is continuing his work with the Arizona Musical Theatre Orchestra with plans to start a new musical theatre orchestra in the Midwest. Meanwhile, he works as the Vocal Music Instructor at Rosati-Kain Academy, assists the arts at Third Baptist Church, and is a collaborative pianist at Greenfinch Theatre & Dive.

Gill Waltman

MADISON JACKSON



Madison Jackson is in her second year as an alto with the Chamber Chorus and has been delighted to grow alongside some of the best musicians she's ever had the pleasure of meeting. Growing up in O'Fallon, Missouri, her love for music started early with the sound of grubby toddler fists

banging out dissonant chords on her parents' piano. Once enrolled in piano lessons, she quickly learned that her favorite use for the piano was to accompany her while she sang.

For many years she was a part of her church's worship band, eventually leading the youth worship band during her high school years. She was part of Francis Howell High School's Women's Chamber Choir which received many accolades and was invited to perform at a choral festival in New York's Carnegie Hall. In her free time, Madison took private voice lessons to help hone her instrument. She is incredibly thankful to her parents for giving her musical passion the support it needed to flourish.

During this same time, she developed a fondness for musical theatre. Young People's Theatre at St. Louis Community College fostered this love until she went on to pursue her BFA in Musical Theatre at Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO). Madison's roles during her collegiate career include Trina (*Falsettos*), Mother Superior (*Sister Act: The Musical*), Violet Newstead (*9 to 5: The Musical*). Her favorite and most impactful experience was the opportunity to originate "Charlie", a role from an original musical produced by SEMO, called "*An American Hero*". This musical told a WWII story of

soldiers fighting valiantly on the front lines, as well as the women working at a munitions factory to keep their country afloat in wartime. She, alongside her classmates, had the opportunity to travel and originate this role in the New York Musical Theatre Festival, where they were awarded "Best New Musical".

Currently, Madison and her fiancé Derrick have a musical duo, called *Twenty Plus* that frequents the St. Louis area, performing covers of pop hits that span the decades from the '60s to today. Their name was derived from interesting circumstances; Maureen Wirtel, Madison's grandmother, couldn't understand why two musicians (dating at the time) hadn't created a band yet. She invited them to perform at her church's monthly senior get-together, called "Fifty Plus". Friends and family noted affably that they were the youngest visitors by several decades - and thus *Twenty Plus* was born.

After graduation, Madison found that she missed the choral world she'd left in high school. She found a posting for the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus online and decided to throw her hat in the ring. She had not seen the choir perform previously, and didn't have a grasp on their expertise and renown. This ended up working in her favor - had she known, the audition may have consisted mostly of a young woman veritably shaking in her boots. Her musicianship (specifically in sightreading music) has been strengthened tenfold, and she has the opportunity with this upcoming concert to perform a solo in *On A Bus to St. Cloud*. The opportunity to view and perform in many of St. Louis' fabulous historical venues has been an unexpected delight, and yet another gift from the choir for which Madison is thankful! When not singing, Madison is an HR generalist for Eyecare Partners.

Gill Waltman

New CD Review by MusicWeb International

Last month saw the official release of our latest CD, *Saint Louis Reflections*, which reflected our city and choir as advocates of the new music written for us over the past three decades. It's an inviting sampling of pieces both sacred and secular and displays the quality of these pieces written for us by some of today's leading choral composers.

These qualities have been recognized in the CD's first review from MusicWeb International, the longest operating and largest online archive of classical music reviews. **John Quinn**, one of its most experienced critics, wrote a highly complimentary review, hailing the choir's commitment to new music via commissions. He noted that this "speaks not only to the generosity of individuals and foundations but also to the extent that the work of the SLCC is valued."

Quinn's comprehensive review assesses each work, noting that the Tabakova *Missa Brevis* "really tests the

sopranos with some very high-lying notes, (yet) the Saint Louis sopranos are undaunted." The music of the late Steven Stucky is "harmonically intriguing," while Kerensa Briggs's contributions really impressed Quinn: "The setting of Psalm 130 is heartfelt while the music for Psalm 121 is expansive and beautiful." The carols by Sasha Johnson Manning and Charles Collins are "fascinating, skillful, (and with) an innocent freshness."

Following similar praise for the disc's other tracks, Quinn concludes: "Once again, Philip Barnes and the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus have provided a stimulating and rewarding programme of recent choral music. We can only applaud their determination to continue to give composers the stimulus to write interesting new choral compositions through the series of commissions they offer. Having commissioned the music, the SLCC then perform it with great accomplishment, as is the case on this disc. I enjoyed and admired in equal measure what I heard here."

NOTEWORTHY NOTES

CHOIR & ORGAN's Review of Saint Louis Reflections

Music critic **Clare Stevens** commented in her review that this CD included commissioned works by the Chorus over a 15-year period almost all reflecting upon despair, "with or without a hopeful resolution."

The CD included "two powerful settings of Psalm 130 *Out of the Depth/De profundis*, by Carl Rützi, who uses the German text, and Kerensa Briggs - the whole of her very impressive trilogy *Height in Depth*". The latter commission was supported by the friends and the estate of **Sarah Bryan Miller**, classical music critic for the Saint Louis Post-Dispatch.

"The album also includes an atmospheric setting of Psalm 121, Lift Thine Eyes, written in Bryan Miller's honour by Judith Bingham. It opens with a marvellous *Missa Brevis* by Dobrinka Tabakova, whose Kyrie really does plumb the depths, responding to the range of one of the choir's regular basses by employing a particularly low register, while its Sanctus makes correspondingly stratospheric demands upon the sopranos. The choir's stamina is tested and its excellent tuning showcased by a substantial setting of Horace's ode *Aequam Memento* by David Matthews."

Clare refers to the "lighter mood evoked by Sasha Johnson Manning's beautiful *Christmas Bells*, its dense textures representing the pealing bells from beginning to end; and a more optimistic note is struck by the concluding track, Melissa Dunphy's *We are the Music Makers*, written during the pandemic with the intention that it could be performed effectively by just four singers (SATB) and a piano." Clare concludes by noting the useful inclusion in the liner booklet of a list of the composers' publishers, "should listeners fancy performing any of these excellent pieces with their own choirs."

GRAMOPHONE – Review of Saint Louis Reflections

The Saint Louis Chamber Chorus's eighth recording for Regent showcases 11 commissions from the past 15 years, all receiving their first recordings. They are deeply felt and often emotionally moving tributes for birthdays, deaths, holidays and other occasions. Although there is nothing particularly St. Louis in style or content, there is a sense of community that nourishes them all.

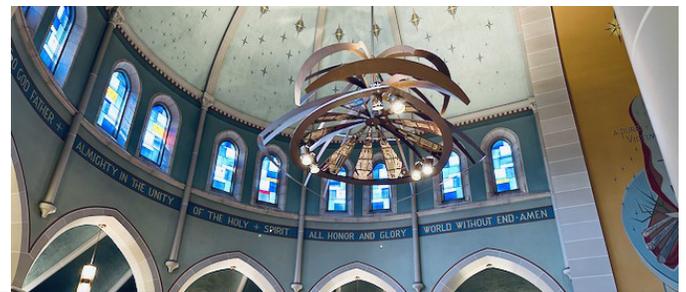
While Dobrinka Tabakova's radiant *Missa Brevis* and Magnus Williamson's quietly ecstatic *Exaltabo* are the most compelling works on the album, the most mysterious is Ivan Moody's haunting arrangement of Hildegard of Bingen's *O Viridissima Virga*, and Melissa Dunphy's optimistic *We are the Music Makers* could become the chorus's marching song. Charles Collins's gently consoling *Joulupuu on Rakennettu* recounts the simple gifts of Christmas and Sasha Johnson Manning's *Christmas Bells*, a carol for double choir, weaves the secular and the religious into a prayer for peace.

David Matthews finds the chorus's sweet spots in the long lines of his *Aequam Memento*, inspired by Horace, while Carl Rützi's *Aus tiefer Not* rises to an impassioned swirl of sound and colour. Steven Stucky's *The Music of Light*, finished just before the composer died, takes lines from the Sufi mystic Kabir exploring the power of music.

None, however, is more poignant than Kerensa Briggs's *Height in Depth Suite* or Judith Bingham's joyful *I Lift up Mine Eyes unto the Hills*, both of which celebrate **Sarah Bryan Miller**, the first female music critic for the St Louis Post-Dispatch – and its last full-time classical music critic when she died in 2020.

The recording at Third Baptist Church in St. Louis captures the size and breadth of the chorus in warm, slightly reverberant sound.

www.gramophone.co.uk/review/saint-louis-reflections



More Images from Concert 1

For more information about concerts, tickets or auditions:

PO Box 11558, Clayton, MO 63105
info@chamberchorus.org
(636) 458-4343
Graphic Designer, Ali Ruzicka

Subscription Purchases:

Buy tickets online at our website
www.chamberchorus.org
or contact Nancy Burstein,
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