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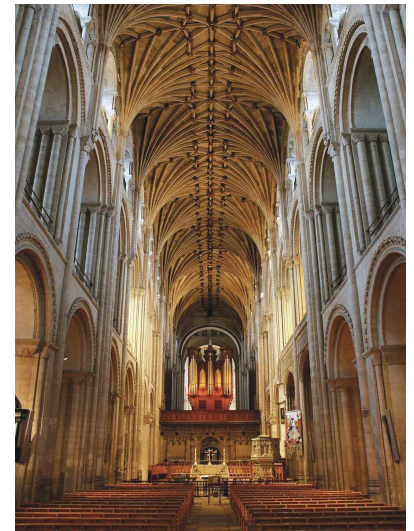
February 2010

Letter from England – Part II

Singing in a quire that was completed in 1101 and living in the shadow (quite literally!) of such a beautiful church reminds me daily of the power of landscape. We sing in various parts of the Norwich Cathedral, each with a distinct acoustic, and I am struck by our different reactions as performers to this chapel or that apse. It certainly strengthens my resolve to maintain a wide choice of venue for the Chamber Chorus, since our itinerant concert series not only keeps us fresh, but also directs the choice of repertoire and ultimately the very 'feel' of every performance.

Both the St. Louis Abbey and the concert hall at Webster University are relative newcomers to our environment, but they are distinct settings and lend themselves to quite varied repertoire. And later in this season you will have the opportunity to sample more historic venues, which will provide an interesting and enjoyable contrast. Clearly, this is a season worth subscribing to on many levels, from the musical to the architectural.

As you follow the Chamber Chorus this year, I will be planning the next two seasons, and I have little doubt that my thinking will be guided by my experiences here in the UK. Doubtless there will be more examples of English choral music to bring to a choir that has deep roots in this tradition, but I suspect that some of its admitted parochialism will prompt me to look beyond the shores of the British Isles and select music from many other fine traditions, not least the wonderful choral music of the USA. What will give a sense of cohesion will be the common thread of excellent writing that I hope typifies our repertoire. For more than fifty years the Chamber Chorus has introduced St. Louis singers and audiences to the very best choral music, and that will remain my focus when I return to work with the singers next summer.



Norwich Cathedral nave

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Philip Barnes

Artistic Director

Message from the President

Welcome to today's concert, *Tchaikovsky's Vespers*, the fourth concert of the 54th season of the St. Louis Chamber Chorus. As usual, Artistic Director **Philip Barnes** has put together a fascinating combination of repertoire and location for this performance. Today's concert is not our first performance here at St. Stanislaus Kostka Church, but it has been seventeen years since we were last here, and it is a pleasure to return to St. Louis' first Polish Catholic parish for this concert featuring Slavic composers both past and contemporary.

We are delighted to welcome the singers of the Washington University Concert Choir and their conductor, Russian repertoire specialist Professor **John Stewart**. SLCC Assistant Conductor **Mary Chapman** will share conducting duties with Professor Stewart in this program.

If you have not attended one of our concerts before, we are very glad to have you with us today. A marvelous benefit of attending performances of the St. Louis Chamber Chorus is the opportunity to see and explore some of St. Louis's most beautiful places of worship, many of which are seldom open to the public. Please join us at our next concert, *Strings Attached*, featuring works for guitar and chorus, on Sunday, April 11 at Grace United Methodist Church, located at the corner of Skinker and Waterman.

Barbara Uhlemann
SLCC President

Composer Comments: Sasha Johnson Manning

The SLCC is a very special choir. I have heard them many times and know the great care they give to each piece they perform. My *Tree of Life* was in very safe and loving hands. They performed it brilliantly and I am very grateful to them for bringing it to such wonderful life. I found Philip Barnes' text a gift to set. As a composer, I think having a close 'relationship' with your text is absolutely vital in order to do it justice.

In 2007, I composed *The Manchester Carols*, now published by Faber Music with a CD released by Naxos. Setting the lyrics of Carol Ann Duffy, Britain's first female Poet Laureate, was another good experience. Her words inspired me and I found that the music flowed out of me. *The Manchester Carols* was broadcast and won the Jerusalem Award for best Christmas Broadcast in the U.K.

Sasha Johnson Manning

Preview of Remaining Concerts

The second half of our season sees yet more 'firsts,' from the St. Louis premiere of Tchaikovsky's *Vespers*, to world premieres by **Yakov Gubanov** (Concert 4) and **Magnus Williamson** (Concert 6). In between lies a remarkable departure from our usual practice of singing *a cappella*: the April 11 performance will be in concert with the famed **Hanser/McClellan guitar duo**. Together we enjoy the wonderful repertoire for this unusual combination of forces, from Franz Schubert (a great 'fan' of the instrument) to Heitor Villa-Lobos and the colorfully named Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco.

That Latin passion is a million miles away from the controlled tension that underpins William Byrd's *Mass for five voices*, a masterwork from the court of Queen Elizabeth I. This very English music will sound right at home in Christ Church Episcopal Cathedral, as should other British pieces by Britten and Greville Cooke, Howells and Vaughan Williams, all chosen to explore the concert's theme, *Home Thoughts from Abroad*. Artistic Director **Philip Barnes** will fly back from England to conduct this season finale.

Philip Barnes

Meet the Singers — John Baggs

John grew up in Palatka, Florida, surrounded by a large, musical family. His mother was a singer and entertained the troops during World War II; her uncle and grandfather played the Irish fiddle. John's Grandma Baggs and seven aunts played piano and two uncles played guitar, all self-taught. "Grandma's house was always full of family and music."

One day, John's mother was listening to the radio and heard someone playing the song's melody on the piano. She was surprised to see two-year-old John pecking out the notes with one finger! He soon added the other fingers and left hand. His elementary school music teacher, **Mr. Hunt**, encouraged John's parents to start him with piano and music theory lessons at age six. John says this gave him a great foundation not only for a career in music, but the discipline of working hard to achieve goals.

As John began high school, Mr. Hunt became choir director and asked him to be an accompanist. Having no experience with choral music, John's first rehearsal was interesting to say the least. He had never tried to play an open score, and he was amazed by the sound.

One day while rehearsing an *a cappella* piece, Mr. Hunt heard John quietly singing along and insisted that he join the singers "right now!" He did...reluctantly...starting as a tenor but eventually moving to baritone. John's love of singing grew. His parents were extremely supportive and attended every concert and recital.

John's high school show choir performed three years in a row at Disney World. He sang in the Florida Senior High All-State Choir receiving superior ratings in the state's Vocal Solo Contest each year. The summer of his junior year, he traveled with America's Youth In Concert, performing at Carnegie Hall, the fourth of July fireworks display in Washington DC, and at various cathedrals and venues throughout Europe. At his senior year audition for the All-State Choir, John achieved perfect grades on the music theory, ear training and sight-reading exams, so was instead awarded a position in the prestigious Florida All-State Reading Choir.

John wanted to major in voice in college but had only sung for four years and had no formal voice training. He applied to Florida State University's

top-rated School of Music (now College) and was thrilled to be offered a scholarship in the Voice Performance program. He studied with **Laura Hillman** and **Yvonne Cianella**, and sang under several notable choral directors.

During college, John worked at a recording studio singing jingles for local businesses. His voice teacher was concerned that singing "pop" would ruin his classical training, but John loved the studio and working until the music was perfect. After receiving his Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance in 1989, he moved to Nashville, TN, to pursue a career as a studio singer.



John Baggs

John found work quickly, singing on demo recordings of choral octavos and cantatas, and later performing background vocals in concert and on recordings for Dolly Parton, Garth Brooks, Sandi Patty, Barry Manilow, Amy Grant, The Judds, Reba McEntire, among others! He was also a section leader, vocal arranger, and soloist at Christ Church Nashville for six years.

John enjoyed his Nashville experiences but not the music industry's business side. After seven years he needed a change. He had friends in St.

Louis and loved the city, so he moved here in 1997 and entered the corporate world. He took a "short" break from singing and eight years later, urged by a friend, sang with the Webster University Choral Society under the direction of **Dr. Kathy Bowers**.

After hearing the St. Louis Chamber Chorus perform he wanted to join! He auditioned as a baritone, but his voice no longer had the low notes Philip required of his basses. John was thrilled to be offered an alternate position as 2nd tenor, and sang the last two concerts of the 50th season. The following season, Philip offered him a full position as 1st tenor. John thought it must be a mistake. "I'm a baritone, not a tenor!" He continues happily as 1st tenor and admits that Philip knows best!

In addition to the Chorus, John now sings tenor with Java Jived, a mixed octet performing jazz and pop standards. He enjoys travel, doing genealogical research and spoiling his cat Gabby. John has lived in the Central West End for over 13 years. He loves the city and is happy to call it home!

Gill Waltman

Noteworthy Notes

New Bantock CD Available Soon

Last November SLCC members generously committed four consecutive evenings to record our new disc, a survey of the music of Sir Granville Bantock, contemporary and friend of Edward Elgar. Once regarded as one of Britain's foremost composers, Bantock fell out of critical favor after World War II, and it is only in recent years that musicians have begun the lengthy process of exploring and reappraising his output. This disc is a crucial step in this process, which may explain why the British label Regent Records was sufficiently interested in the project to produce and release the CD. It takes about 15 months to create a master tape from the various 'takes,' making edits where necessary and in consultation with conductor, producers and engineer. Then there is the compilation (and ultimately proofing) of the printed materials that accompany the disc, from an account of the singers involved, to the texts sung, and finally a lengthy, in-depth essay on Bantock and his music by our own Philip Barnes. But finally here we are, with a new recording that doubtless will attract the interest of 'Bantockians' around the globe, not to mention classical music lovers in general. Watch this space for its critical reception over the coming months!

Buy Our Latest CD Online

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www.chamberchorus.org

Gathering at Café Eau

Following the Chamber Chorus Christmas concert on December 20 at the Cathedral Basilica, an enthusiastic group of Chamber Chorus Board members, singers and friends of the Chorus gathered at Café Eau in the Chase Park Plaza Hotel to toast the holidays and congratulate members of the choir for their beautiful, inspiring concert called *A New World Christmas*. Assistant conductors **Mary Chapman** and **Orin Johnson** were on hand to accept personal congratulations for jointly conducting this very successful concert. Chapman and Johnson are sharing conducting responsibilities this season while **Philip Barnes**, Artistic Director, is in England on sabbatical.



Kathy Smith Bowers, Dave Bowers, John Uhlemann, Barbara Uhlemann, and George Durnell at Café Eau

Watch for reservation details from the Chamber Chorus Board regarding our Spring Soirée to be held on May 30 following the final concert of the year. At the Spring Soirée we will celebrate our 54th season of bringing the finest *a cappella* choral works to St. Louis area audiences. We hope you will join us for this festive occasion.

Gailya Barker

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