



VOICEMAIL



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THE
SAINT LOUIS
CHAMBER
CHORUS

CHAMBER CHORUS CHRISTMAS COMMISSIONS

The SLCC Christmas concert is traditionally the most popular and well-attended performance of the season. The repertoire chosen by Philip for the December 20 presentation celebrated the many carols and seasonal compositions written expressly for the Chamber Chorus over his three-decade leadership. Philip has championed commissioned works since he took over as artistic director; the November 8 presentation recognized the role he has played in highlighting women composers, several of whose commissioned works were represented in this Christmas event.

Philip was joined on stage at Third Baptist Church by Andy Jensen, associate professor of music at Southwestern Illinois College, for a conversation about Christmas music commissioned from three continents. Andy is an assistant conductor and a tenor in the Chorus whose career as a choir director in both church and college has introduced him to a wide variety of repertoire.

Their conversation brought to life the composers and the inspirations and influences that contributed to their music. In a new composition, there is often a combination of an old text with a new melody, but in some cases the new music incorporates earlier styles such as plainchant, or older European influences.

One of the features of this choir that attracts composers is not only its expertise in executing complex works, but its size and wide range of voices. Andy mentioned that several composers have written for the lowest register voices as we have many capable deep voices in our choir. Composers know that this Chorus can deliver the vision of the sounds they had conjured in their heads. Philip says these are the reasons that his calls to composers around the world are answered!

Andy said the singers love compositions with parts allowing the entire choir to sing at maximum volume. Philip remarked that those pieces are the bane of a radio station for the host and musical engineer to get the right balance for broadcast. It is best appreciated at a live concert, especially in the front few rows!

The size of our Chorus allows a composer to write for two choirs. This might take the form of two choirs passing musical phrases back and forth in a live performance 'like a vocal tennis match', or two independent texts set to different music and combined with great effect as heard in Christmas Bells by **Sasha Johnson Manning**. Commissioned compositions written for double choirs that were featured in this event included those by **Wolfram Buchenberg**, **Ēriks Ešēvalds**, **Sasha Johnson Manning**, **Judith Bingham** and **Bob Chilcott**.

Gill Waltman



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A Little More History

We hope that our performances this season give you a look into our history and a better understanding of the background of the Chorus and of the thinking that goes into how we operate.

One wonderful part of our history is our long line of very talented artistic leaders. Last Fall, St. Louis and the nation's music community lost **Stephen Curtis**, who led the Chorus from 1984 to 1987.

Curtis had earned degrees from Middlebury College (A.B.) and Washington University (M.M. and Ph.D.) and had served as the associate dean of humanities at the Forest Park campus of St. Louis Community College. He went on to a distinguished career leading the Hudson Valley Community College/SUNY and portions of the City University of New York (CUNY). He also served as the President of Community College of Philadelphia for 14 years.

Curtis took over the Chamber Chorus during challenging times for the Chorus. He not only consolidated its place financially and artistically, but he also shared a creative vision that maintained our reputation in the St. Louis artistic community. This explains why so many talented musicians aspired to succeed him when he left St. Louis. During his tenure with us, Curtis moved the group away from accompanied music, performing more without instruments. He also reinstated the Chorus tradition of presenting concerts in varied locations and structured each program around a theme. We have continued some of his innovations as part of our culture, like commissioning new works, though choreographing the Chorus to dance as it sang, as in an April 1987 concert, is not on our immediate horizon (sorry to disappoint!).

Those who knew Stephen Curtis loved him and respected him. We have lost a talented man.

Dick Brickson

ESLEY HAMILTON - ARCHITECTURAL AND PRESERVATION HISTORIAN



Esley Hamilton has close ties to the SLCC, having sung with the Chorus from 1984 to 1998, overlapping Philip Barnes' first few seasons as artistic director. He is best known to our audiences for his captivating and knowledgeable architectural and historical descriptions of the concert venues. Regular concertgoers know that in a

normal season, each of the six concerts is performed in a different venue chosen by Philip; Esley's commentaries about these buildings are published in the season brochure and are available on the website.

Esley, recently retired, was the preservation historian for the Historic Buildings Commission of the St. Louis County Parks and Recreation. He is well known as an architectural researcher, author, editor and lecturer presenting and publishing his research on the historic buildings in St. Louis County, many of which are now listed. He is the acclaimed authority on all historical architectural matters in the area. He is the editor of the St. Louis Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians. He teaches classes at Washington University on landscape architecture and preservation and received an honorary doctorate from the University of Missouri-St. Louis in May 2009.

Esley wanted to stay connected to the SLCC after retiring from the Chorus in 1998 because of increasing demands in his professional life. It was at this time that Philip, intent upon exploring the wide variety of architectural jewels St. Louis has to offer as potential venues, suggested that Esley might provide a brief vignette on the background and architecture of each venue.

As the 40th season approached, Esley was the obvious choice to write the history of the first four decades of the Chamber Chorus. Philip realized that it was a tough assignment because the supporting materials were scattered widely between different people's collections and memories. Esley painstakingly gathered the information and in 1995 he wrote and published *A Brief History of the St. Louis Chamber Chorus: 'Forty Years On'*. This was printed and distributed to our supporters at the time. Philip recalls that in the same year the Chorus performed *An American Christmas* at Pilgrim Congregational in the Central West End, the church Esley belonged to and in whose church choir he sang.

At our last SLCC fundraising auction held at Washington University in September 2016, one of the sold-out items was a chance to join a historical group tour of the New Mount Sinai Cemetery led by Esley in mid-October, which preceded the performance held there by the Chamber Chorus in November.

Esley retired recently from the St. Louis County Parks and Recreation having served almost forty years as preservation historian for the county's Historic Buildings Commission. Since his official retirement Philip says that Esley has kept up a blistering pace of activities across the arts. Before COVID you were likely to run across him at a concert, play, or academic presentation. He is a true scholar, a local legend, and we have been very fortunate that he has been willing to contribute his time and knowledge for so many years, particularly for his descriptions of our myriad venues.

Esley will join Philip for an on-stage live conversation at the next 'concert' presentation in April. The topic to be discussed is the intersection of repertoire with architecture.

ALI RUZICKA – GRAPHIC DESIGNER AND ART LOVER



Ali Ruzicka is a native St. Louisan and has been working behind the scenes for the last two years with SLCC. She has been so excited to help design the printed materials as well as this publication. Ali has partnered to help visualize and bring to life the seasonal theme of each concert.

As a young child growing up, Ali was always drawn to the arts and

added many classes to her curriculum while attending Kirkwood High School. As she ventured into college at Webster University, she honed in on what has become her passion; graphic design. While attending Webster University Ali spent a semester abroad in Vienna, Austria. When she wasn't learning book binding, she explored the city and often found herself in one of the many museums seeing firsthand the artwork she was learning about. While abroad she was able to visit many places on her bucket list. One was Prague, Czech Republic where her father's family originated. She was in awe of the history and the beauty of the city talked about by her grandparents and parents.

Before the pandemic, Ali would travel often to visit her older sister who has lived in Manhattan for over ten years. She would visit the MOMA and the Met never getting enough of the inspiring artwork on display. A favorite memory was seeing a five-section, 33,000-pound slab of the Berlin Wall in Midtown almost hidden in a small park between Park and Madison Avenues. Another favorite is visiting Bemelmans Bar located in The Carlyle Hotel

because of Ludwig Bemelman's famed murals; Bemelman created the Madeline children's books series which she loved as a child.

Ali has been working in the industry for over a decade, launching her career with Stephens Creative, where she started as an intern. There she learned all aspects of the graphic design process. As she built out both her portfolio and network of clients, she has found herself in high demand through free-lance projects. Her passion is to help companies establish their brands, while maintaining an important focus on client relations and satisfaction.

Ali continues to conceptualize and create publications, brochures, and a multitude of other productions for clients. She has developed a reputation for generating flexible designs suited for clients from multiple backgrounds. Much of her work since college had been created digitally but lately, she has been getting back to drawing and sketching her ideas and concepts. Her favorite medium is graphite but when working on a large scale drawing her favorite materials are charcoal and conte.

Working with the SLCC has brought back great memories of spending time as a child attending her sister's orchestra concerts at Powell Hall. Her grandfather also had a love of classical music. She often finds herself using music in her background to spark creativity, a sense of calm and joy.

Since Ali has built such an attachment to St. Louis, she finds happiness in supporting local businesses and artists. She has a growing art collection, loves to indulge in locally made home and body care products, and enjoys seeking out new small businesses to support. Her other great loves are her dog Jet, adopted from a rescue shelter, and a simple night of indulging in a great glass of white wine.

Mistaken Identity!

A few days ago, we received a request from someone in North Wales asking for any photos we might still have that documented our tour to Great Britain, and specifically, our collaboration with a chorus in Caernavon. This was a little confusing as we have never toured abroad, much less worked with "Côr Meibion Carnafon," one of Wales's most famous male voice choirs! After some research, we were able to redirect the inquiry to the St. Louis Women's Chorale – simply a case of mistaken identity. But the incident showed how another choir is trying to weather the COVID storm.

Like us, they are using this enforced silence to reflect on where they have come from, their past achievements, and why they should carry on. And this pattern is being repeated all over the world: it turns out a little

introspection isn't a bad thing! The challenge, though, is to keep a clear vision of the unique power of choral music, and in live performance. Our retrospective program has reminded us of the repertoire of yesteryear, even those with accompaniment (!), and we intend to present some of these next season "with a little help from our friends," to quote The Beatles.

We know that the pandemic will end, we believe that people like to sing, and we trust that audiences will return. Confident in that belief, we are already planning the next season – our 66th – and selecting venues and repertoire that will bring joy and inspiration to all concerned.

Philip Barnes

Get Well Wishes

We were sorry to learn that our producer at Regent Records, **Gary Cole**, has been hospitalized because of COVID, now happily on the mend, and we hope for happier and healthier times to welcome him back to

St. Louis for another recording project. To all our musicians and friends who have been affected by the coronavirus, you are in our thoughts and we hope you can be with us when the virus abates.

NOTEWORTHY NOTES

ADAPTING TO THE PANDEMIC

Assistant conductors Orin Johnson and Andy Jensen describe adaptations made to their professional and personal lives during the pandemic.

Orin Johnson is the Director of Music Ministries at Sts. Joachim and Ann Catholic Church. As the pandemic began last March, he and his peers in sacred music had to pivot quickly to new techniques, ideas, and even new purposes for their ministries

‘Initially, that meant finding a way to broadcast services over the Internet and reimagining what Holy Week and Easter would look and sound like, on very short notice. Thankfully, a parishioner who owns a visual communications firm quickly stepped forward to solve the streaming issues. Simplified services with perhaps a tenth of our usual musical forces made the holiest time of the year prayerful and successful in those earliest days of the pandemic, even if very strange.

The archdiocese mandates that services be led musically by one accompanist and one cantor. To keep our many dozens of other choristers and instrumentalists involved, tried several ideas. We put together several virtual choir efforts, though audio only — adding a video component makes these productions immediately at least ten times harder. We also hosted several Zoom sessions to just visit and “catch up,” recognizing the social component of choirs; a few sessions have included guest speakers on music and liturgy, offering both education and spiritual fulfillment.

Over Christmas we expanded our music slightly, within the “spirit of the law” allowing households to sing as a unit at a few masses, offering those families a rare if unique chance to sing together at such a special time of the year.’

Transitioning to virtual efforts often took as much or more time than the former tasks they replaced. Orin found time for other pursuits; writing for Liturgical Press, catching up on home improvement projects, and knitting - taught to Erin and Orin by SLCC bass **Jay Harkey’s** daughter, Gwen!

‘We look forward to a time when our musical forces can return to a more normal experience! Until then, technologies and creative thinking keep us together and give us some purpose and life.’



Andy Jensen is an associate professor of music at Southwestern Illinois College and has not met with his student choirs since early March 2020, about the time of the last live SLCC rehearsal. ‘Believe it or not, the last collaborative rehearsal I attended was back in mid-March as the pandemic emerged in our region. We normally

have two choirs, serving approximately 40 singers. Since then, my music making has been limited to solo singing for worship services on Zoom, pre-recorded projects using the Acapella App, and daily piano practice. Those who know me are aware of my legendary status as a terrible pianist, but I’m happy to report significant improvement over the past 10 months. In some ways that’s the story of my 2020 experience.

After a period of stagnation, I began exploring outlets for my pent-up creative energy. At first it was puzzles. Then I began practicing piano. Soon I found myself working on minor home projects with guidance from YouTube and before I knew it, I was knee deep in a full-blown remodeling of the upper level of our home. A year ago, I could hardly swing a hammer and now I’ve developed the confidence and skills to take on almost any home repair... except plumbing!

Over the past few months, I’ve turned my attention to woodworking and have already completed a handful of projects including cat towers, a bird feeder, nightstands, and most recently, a woodworking table that integrates various tools. I remain hopeful for the future and eagerly await the time when we can safely return to singing, but I’m also thankful for the ways this past year has challenged me to develop new skills and means of expression. May 2021 bring us health, prosperity, and opportunities to gather together and lift our voices in song!’

For more information about concerts, tickets or auditions:

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Advance Ticket Purchases:

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