



# VOICEMAIL



## VISIT TO THE HOLY LAND



This season's December concert was held at Second Presbyterian Church in the Central West End. Appropriately for Christmas and following the Choral Atlas theme, the repertoire featured music from 'The Holy Land.' **Philip Barnes** commented that 'holy land' can have different meanings and perspectives for different people, one of which is a location that we find sacred. The program ranged from the 16th century (Lassus) up to today with a new commission by

our Composer-in-Residence, **Kerensa Briggs**, who traveled from the UK for the performance. Obviously, her work, *Seeking You*, was new to the audience, but other pieces were perhaps familiar from previous concerts. As critic **George Yeh** noted, the concert demonstrated the Chorus's "tradition of walking less familiar musical paths compared to most classical music organizations at Christmas time."

The program began with the opening of Virgil Thomson's *Scenes from The Holy Infancy* (with parts 2 and 3 in the second half of the concert) followed by John Rutter's *Wexford Carol*. Barnes commented that Rutter has become synonymous with carols in recent decades and is recognized for both his own compositions and brilliant arrangements. By contrast, Herbert Howells created entirely new music to set *Long, Long Ago*, a poem written by John Buxton in 1944 while in a German POW camp. Three pieces by Peter Warlock, William James, and Paul Nelson approached the birthplace of Jesus in unique ways, using imagery from England, Australia, and Judaea. The next works were conducted by our assistant conductors: **Orin Johnson** conducted Edmund Walters' *Iona* which described the mystery of that Scottish holy island, and then **Caroline Ibnabdeljalil** conducted *Christmas 1914* by Malcolm Williamson that contrasted the selflessness of Jesus with that of a young English midshipman in World War One. The first half concluded with the world premiere of *Seeking You* with lyrics by **Charles Anthony Sylvestri** and set to music by Briggs. Sylvestri was unable to attend due to serious illness, so Barnes read his poem on his behalf. During the intermission, audience members were treated to refreshments and an opportunity to meet Kerensa Briggs.

The second half of the concert began with the beautifully harmonic *Omnes de Saba* by Lassus. Parts 2 and 3 of Thomson's *Scenes from the Holy Infancy* bracketed two works describing the three kings as they visited the manger. The first was composed by German composer, Peter Cornelius, and the second by Healey Willan, a prolific Anglo-Canadian from the last century. *The Three Drovers*, a second piece by Australian composer William James, referred to drovers instead of wise men riding in the dry heat of summer as they followed the star. The concert concluded with an audience favorite - *The Shepherd's Carol* by Bob Chilcott, followed by an encore, *I Wonder As I Wander*, arranged by Andrew Carter.

**Gill Waltman**

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THE SAINT LOUIS CHAMBER CHORUS

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Are you talented enough to compose a major piece of music? I know I am not!

Think of the joy it would bring if you created something beautiful that accomplished singers would like to sing, that talented musicians would like to play, that appreciative audiences would like to hear. Instead, what if you were the person who made it possible for a talented composer to create that beautiful music?

For years now, the St. Louis Chamber Chorus has made it possible for you to make that happen and find you a world class composer and enable him or her to take the time and invest the energy and love that it takes to create beautiful music. No other choirs in St. Louis make this opportunity available to its audiences so frequently and so consistently.

Several years ago, my wife Marilyn and I talked with **Philip Barnes** and asked to commission a new piece of music by **Clare Maclean**, our “composer-in-residence” at the time. Clare is a New Zealand composer living in Australia. The Chorus commissioned her to set Psalm 137 to music. She wrote a beautiful piece that the Chorus sang in 2005 (a world premiere) and again in 2007.

For the world premiere, we brought Clare to St. Louis – it was her first trip to the Northern Hemisphere! We shared a meal, a concert, and a great experience.

It was a joy to make that music possible and I know others who have commissioned works and enjoyed the same experience. Some people commission music to commemorate a meaningful life event – an anniversary, a birthday, a special occasion. That makes the memory even more special.

How much does it cost to commission a work? About the same as a fairly old Toyota Corolla! That is, in the range of about \$5,000 to \$15,000. On the one hand, an old Toyota may last a couple more years. On the other hand, the memories, and the art you are creating will last much longer... and be a lot more meaningful!

I encourage you to take advantage of our program to commission new music just let Philip, Nancy Burstein, Katie Sandquist or me know that you would like to explore underwriting a new commission. It is rewarding in ways you won't anticipate and will remember for years.

**Dick Brickson**

## ANGELA CASTELLI



Angela grew up in St. Louis and says “music has always been an important part of my life. My mom still shares a video from when I was almost three singing *God Bless America* and I stayed in key almost the entire time!”

Angela was heavily involved in the choir program at Fort Zumwalt South High School.

It was there that she says she

initially found her passion for music and choral singing.

**Jason Martin**, the choir director, taught and inspired her to pursue music education after high school. She sang in every choir she possibly could, performed in several honor choirs, and received exemplary ratings at Solo & Ensemble at the district and state level.

Angela studied Vocal Music Education at Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri. She sang for three years under the direction of **Dr. Cameron F. LaBarr** in the Missouri State University Chorale, the flagship touring choir of Missouri State's Department of Music. During that time, Angela traveled to sing in cities such as Kansas City and Chicago; states, including Colorado, Massachusetts, Nebraska, and New York; and internationally to Ireland. She was also a part of three professionally produced albums with Soundmirror: “On My Way (2020),” “Mysterium (2020),” and “William Averitt: Easter, 1906 (2022).”

This is Angela's third year as a member of the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus. She was first introduced to the

Chorus in the fall of 2021 while student-teaching in the area. At the time, she missed singing in a high-level choir, so researched various St. Louis choirs. One of her cooperating teachers, **Karey Fitzpatrick**, mentioned that she was once part of SLCC, so Angela scheduled an audition– in fact, she says that it was the last audition date for the upcoming season!

Angela is now in her second year of teaching. She is the choir director at Timberland High School in the Wentzville School District, teaching and conducting five ensembles: Baritone Choir, Treble Choir, Select Treble Choir, Concert Choir, and Chamber Choir. She is also the music director for their upcoming musical, “The Hunchback of Notre Dame”. Angela works with over 70 students each day, many of whom are involved in other musical activities such as the District Honor Choir and Solo & Ensemble. This year, one of her students was selected to perform with the 50th Missouri All-State Choir at the Missouri Music Educators Association Conference in January.

When Angela is not teaching or singing, she enjoys spending time with family and friends. She has become an avid reader in her free time. Her favorite genres include fantasy, thriller, and romance. She loves getting book recommendations– some of her students have started recommending books for her. Angela likes to travel and visit new places. Last summer, she traveled to Hot Springs, Arkansas and later in February, she is going to visit Mammoth Cave in Kentucky.

**Gill Waltman**

## SCOTT LUNTE



Scott is the youngest child of five in an incredibly musical family, born and raised in Arnold, just south of St. Louis. His parents encouraged him to pursue music from an early age. His earliest musical memory is singing *Happy Birthday Jesus* at Canaan Baptist Church at age five before the whole congregation while his parents sat in the

front pew. “My mom practically did an interpretive dance in her seat with different motions to help me remember the words. I handled the key change in the middle of the song masterfully, if I do say so myself.”

Music continued to be an important part of Scott’s childhood. He was a member of the St. Louis Children’s Choirs for seven years, providing foundational musical training and opportunities, including singing at Carnegie Hall. His parents took every opportunity for him to sing, including auditioning and performing in the MCDA Summer Youth Choir each summer in Jefferson City from fifth to tenth grade.

In high school, Scott was always involved in choir, taking solos and small ensembles to state each year, and participating in All-State Choir in his junior and senior years. Some of his fondest memories from high school are from choir. “I greatly looked up to my choir director, **Mark Cotter**, to the point where I was convinced that I wanted to be just like him and be a high school choir director.

Scott applied to Webster University in 2014 as a music education major. However, over the summer he realized that that simply would not work for three main reasons: “I’m not a big fan of kids, I knew I would be deeply discouraged when I wasn’t at the level of my high school choir director straight out of the gate, and I was neglecting the other big passions in my life, mainly politics and law.” Therefore, when it came time to sign up for freshman year classes, Scott switched his major to political science and never looked back. However, singing never left his life. He joined Webster’s Chamber Choir and was able “to enjoy making music for the joy of it, and not out of academic obligation.”

Scott attended law school at the University of Missouri, graduating in May 2022. Currently, Scott is in his second year as a civil defense lawyer at a private firm in St. Louis County focusing on defending against personal injury and premises liability suits. Apart from singing in the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus, he sings as a section leader in the choir at Episcopal Church of the Holy Communion under the direction of SLCC member **Mary Chapman**. It was Mary who encouraged him for years to join SLCC, finally roping in Scott (bass) and boyfriend **Ethan Forte** (tenor) for the SLCC recording session in January 2023. They joined the choir for the remaining concerts in the 2022-2023 season and are now in their first full season in the Chorus. “The continued opportunity to make music, and with a group of singers at this caliber, has been a true blessing and shows that no matter what you do 9-5, there’s always room for music in your life.”

**Gill Waltman**

## AUDIENCE RESPONSE TO RECENT SURVEY

We’re always interested to hear what our audience values about the Chamber Chorus, where we are succeeding and where we can improve. With that in mind, a survey was recently distributed among our concertgoers, and a good amount of comment and criticism was received. Perhaps you will agree or differ with some of the following! Venue selection was a key feature of our programs, eliciting responses such as “Love the thought that goes into venue selection ... sometimes they are a challenge ... wonderful choices ... a seating chart would be appreciated.” The quality of the performance was uniformly recognized: “Incredible voices ... best chorus in town ... innovative programs ... a fabulous chorus ... beautiful harmony.” Finally, the power of the Chorus to transport audiences was widely appreciated: “Makes my thoughts wander ... takes you away from today’s miseries ... the music gave me goosebumps and nearly made me cry with its beauty ... ethereal.” It was gratifying to read that so many people

recognized the preeminence of the Chamber Chorus in a city filled with fine choirs: “You are a St. Louis treasure ... best in chorus in town ... you have always been high quality ... one of the top three classical music organizations in St. Louis, with the Symphony and Opera Theatre...”

Respondents wished for more opportunities to mingle with both fellow concertgoers and the singers; they appreciated the opportunity for living composers to hear their music brought to life by the Chorus and were delighted to meet them at concerts. A shortage of bathrooms and parking space at a historic venue can be a frustration, but that is, of course, beyond our control! All in all, though, the takeaway was that our unique mission resonates with so many people who value the Chorus and its concerts; it encourages us to “keep up the good work!”

**Philip Barnes**



# NOTEWORTHY NOTES

## CHORAL MUSIC FROM MEXICO



*Magnificent mosaics and stained-glass windows in St. Cecilia Church*

Our November destination in the Chorus's whistle-stop tour around our 'Choral Atlas', **Philip Barnes** concentrated on music from just one country – Mexico. His research revealed a rich vein of creativity dating back to the early days of the conquistadors, commenting that the Aztec also composed music, but as it was never documented in written form most of it was lost over time. However, with his typical ingenuity, Barnes tracked down three works which the Chorus performed in Nahuatl – the Aztec native language. The concert was held on Sunday November 5, 2023, at the historic Saint Cecilia Church in South St. Louis, once considered for closure by the Catholic Archdiocese, but saved from the chopping block due to its powerful Hispanic heritage. It is interesting that St. Cecilia is the patron saint of music – and her name day was also in November.

The repertoire included works sung in Nahuatl by 20th century composer Carlos Chavez, a leader of the Mexican school of classical music, and whom one audience member had actually heard in person more than half a century ago during a visit to Mexico City! The other Nahuatl pieces were much older, coming from the early years of the 'conquest' in the 16th century, and composed by both settler and indigenous musicians, Hernando Franco and Francisco Hernández.

With more proof that the Chorus continues to champion women composers in its repertoire, the program included a charming cycle of 'sea songs' by Professor Maria Granillo from Mexico City, and two more pieces sung in Spanish composed by Manuel de Zumaya and Manuel Ponce. With two other Latin works by Juan Gutierrez de Padilla and Francisco Lopez Capillas, the program proved that – linguistically as well as musically – this is a very versatile choir! Music critic **George Yeh**, whose knowledge of classical music is extensive, to say the least, commented in his review that almost the entire program was new, with only two of the composers' names familiar to him. In addition, he noted that the Chorus had previously performed only one of the featured composers, so in fact, most of the program was also new to the singers. A concert, that demonstrated the Chorus's mission "not only to entertain, but to educate and inspire."

**Gill Waltman**

## CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

In the past year or so, **George Yeh**, the erudite music critic at the community radio station, KDHX 88.1, has written detailed reviews of the Chamber Chorus concerts. Yeh has an extensive knowledge of classical music and choral music in particular, and his reviews are a delight to read. **Philip Barnes** commented that Yeh's reviews are comprehensive, complimentary yet not without constructive criticism when it is deserved!

Yeh's reviews of the past two concerts can be accessed via the following QR codes:



**Concert two  
November**



**Concert three  
December**



*Kerensa Briggs with Philip Barnes discussing the performance after the December concert.*

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