

MID-COLUMBIA MASTERSINGERS 2014-2015 SEASON

PRESENTING

CHOR ANNO

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 7:30 PM

ST. JOSEPH'S CHAPEL, KENNEWICK



Transforming lives through the power of choral music

MID-COLUMBIA MASTERSINGERS

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Kathy Payne
Julie Wiley
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September 20, 2014
MCM with Chor Anno

October 10, 11 & 12, 2014
Annual Latino Outreach Concert

November 9, 2014
Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem*

February 6, 7 & 8, 2015
Britten's opera *Noye's Fludde* with ACT

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MID-COLUMBIA MASTERSINGERS 2014-2015 SPECIAL EVENTS

December 5: Handel's *Messiah* with the Mid-Columbia Symphony
December 13-14: Handel's *Messiah* with the Washington-Idaho Symphony
January 25: Holst's *The Planets* with the Mid-Columbia Symphony
March 7: Friendraiser 2015 at Terra Blanca Winery
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Program

This is a first for us with regard to our approach to a printed program. Traditionally, it's been a page with title, composer, and maybe a few program notes. OK, we won't go completely away from that. Look to the left for a list of our concert works. They're parallel to my comments related to the piece.

I was hoping you might consider reading my little essay as I pose a question and then let our music unfold and, just maybe, provide an answer.

First, let me say, we dedicate this concert to our friend and colleague, Neil Lieurance. I first met Neil when he showed up in my choir the first day of my brand new job in Castle Rock, WA. I was fresh out of college, still marveling that someone might actually pay me to teach music. He was probably 16, a junior. I was 21 years old and pretty much clueless. Neil made my life much easier for he was a marvelous piano player, could read music as well as I, and could sing beautifully. He told me he wanted to teach music. After graduating from WWU, he did exactly that. Spent 30 years at Shorecrest High School north of Seattle. Neil had great choirs. Year after year one could count on a Lieurance choir being heard at professional organization conferences. In one of the great honors of one's career, he was invited to take his choir to sing for a national conference of the choral directors association (ACDA) in New Orleans. He was a kindly and loving person who managed to elicit the utmost passion for the music in his singers. While we mourn his loss this past May, we celebrate his life and contribution to his thousands of students and to us.

My attempt for today's program is to create a kind of narrative that not only ties our individual choral works together, but speaks to the very reasons we find singing so meaningful and important to us. So meaningful, in fact, that members of Chor Anno drive to Vancouver, Washington three times a year for rehearsals and performances. They come from Boise, Pullman, Walla Walla, and Tacoma, among other northwest cities. One member even flies from Laramie, Wyoming. Trust me, it isn't money. No one gets paid.

Perhaps you sing. Why do you do this? Why do we do this?

Craig Hella Johnson, who directs the fabulous *Conspirare*, a vocal group of similar size to *Chor Anno*, wrote *Requiem*, our first piece. Craig, in a TED talk you can find on *YouTube*, rather thinks it's "in the enchantment." Hmm, does that seem vague? OK, maybe you'll figure it out a little further into the concert. Or you may look Craig up on *YouTube* and listen to him explain what he's talking about.

I've often said that I think singing...all live music making...offers glimpses of Beauty (note the capital "B"), often nigh on to the Divine. You may ask, but I don't know exactly what that means myself.

Requiem - Gilkyson/Craig
Hella Johnson
Brian Hoskins, Piano

Whether you are one who chooses to take the lyrics literally for *Requiem*, or assume, as I do, that this cry of the heart by Eliza Gilkyson for the loss sustained by people of the great Asian tsunami of 2004 uses "mary" as a metaphor and a plea for consolation. It doesn't matter. You, as I, have suffered loss. Perhaps you'll know, not in your head, but in your heart (as Craig says) why this simple song takes on such meaning for each of us.

Herz Mein Herz - Carl Derfler (conducted by Solveig Holmquist)

Unless you speak German, you'll need a translation for the next piece, *Herz Mein Herz*, and conducted by one of our members, Solveig Holmquist, formerly of Western Oregon University. Perhaps the words projected on the screen will help. (Pretend you're at an opera.) It's likely that each of us has used song to help us deal with the pain of loss in its many forms. Contemporary composer Carl Derfler wrote this intimate setting of a poem by Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), one of Germany's most beloved poets, to help him move through the grief of his own father's death. This conversation with one's own heart is particularly touching.

The Pasture - Z. Randall Stroope
Brian Hoskins, Piano

Though his poem, *The Pasture*, is moving in itself, I bet even Robert Frost, author of the text for our next choral work, would agree with the idea that words are flimsy messengers. Perhaps the right music, well done, can help us understand the "world beneath words." Frost's marvelous poetry uses simple, everyday words. The entire text will be projected on the screen, but, in short, Frost says in *The Pasture*, "I'm going out to clean the pasture spring: I shan't be long. I'll only stop to rake the leaves away... And watch the water clear I may. I shan't be gone long. You come, too. I'm going out to fetch the little calf... The calf that's standing by the mother. It is so young, it totters when she licks it with her tongue. I shan't be gone long. You come, too."

Our friend, Neil Lieurance, who grew up on a farm outside Castle Rock, said his father occasionally said similar words to him in relation to going out to be sure the well pump was working right. Neil said his family was not given easily to words of affection, but he took his father's "you come, too" as a metaphor for "I love you."

Neil was a master at what he did. As one of his students said, "Neil was able to draw out excellence from high school students...we were so proud to be part of such a great music program!" (Keri Johnson - a Shorecrest student, and now a professional musician in the LA area.)

We talked by email, telephone and in person a good many times after his diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. Not once did he seem down about it. I once said, "We often hear the phrase, 'we're all in the same boat.' I'm not so sure about that. To me it's more like we're all in our own little boat, meandering a bit, but all heading for the same shore." He laughed and said, "...could be. I'm suspect my boat is getting pretty close to the dock!"

To Everything There Is A Season - Miklos Rozsa

He seemed reconciled to the notions found in the text of the work called *To Everything There Is a Season*. He packaged up and mailed me fifty copies of this work written by Miklos Rozsa, better known for his movie scores, including "Ben Hur." It's difficult! He laughingly said he was probably crazy to even have attempted this with his high school choir. But they pulled it off. I listened to the CD of the live performance (recorded by Al Giles, the same guy who is recording today's concert). You know the text from Ecclesiastes. A time for virtually everything...to be born, die, plant, pluck up what is planted, to kill, heal, weep, laugh, love, hate...and so on. By the time Neil's accomplished singers reached "a time for peace" and then began the "Alleluia" that followed, it was abundantly clear, even on the CD, that these kids were pouring their very souls into that performance. At Neil's funeral I talked to several who were in that choir. Each reiterated what a powerful and unforgettable event this was for them.

It would be cool (maybe) if the text said “To Everything There Is a Reason.” And then proceeded to lay it out for us. Not gonna happen. It doesn’t seem to answer our question as to why we do what we do as singers. But that performance by Neil’s kids touched on an answer. We hope our performance today moves us along toward an understanding of this “world beneath words.”

Banks of Doon - Donna Gartman Schultz
Violin - Mary K French
Brian Hoskins, piano

The heart doesn’t exactly deal with loss by ranking it on a scale of one to ten. The pain of a false love, for a child or for an adult, the death of a friend, it matters not. The agony is real. Donna Gartman Schultz, a marvelous northwest composer and friend of ours, wonders how the “fair blooms and singing birds” on the Banks of Doon can continue when the broken-hearted one is so full of care. I’ve often wondered why and how we can sing in the midst of such care. Yet, we do.

O Salutaris Hostia - Eriks Esenvalds
Molly Holleran, Soprano,
Nicole Lamartine. Soprano

It’s not bad diction, oh, my gosh, they’re singing in Latin! Choirs do that a lot. Latin is one of the more common languages for choral music, it seems. I’ve heard whole concerts in Latin. Could they just as easily have played the music on instruments? Maybe, but I doubt it! The music was conceived with realwords in mind. While there is a “world beneath words,” the words most often profoundly influence that world. Along with the gorgeous voices of our two soprano soloists Molly Holleran and Nicole Lamartine, I’m hoping you also sense the plea of the Latin words in O Salutaris Hostia. Eriks Esenvalds, a young Latvian composer, sets this ancient text. Check the screen for the translation.

Are we any nearer discovering why we sing? Maybe, but let’s move along here. The awful losses of 9/11 sucked the very spirit of life out me, or so it seemed. The first stirrings of its return came as I watched TV and listened to the music coming from the national cathedral, then from my rehearsing the “Kyrie” of the Mass in G by Schubert, and even from the intensely emotional singing of the national anthem by a group of high school kids at the first Mariner’s game after this tragic event...the latter as I listened on a car radio! Can you imagine a solemn national event or festival without music? Can music heal?

Wenn ein starker Gewappneter (When a Strong Man) Johannes Brahms
(conducted by Solveig Holmquist)

For the festival concerts that opened the Hamburg Industrial Exhibition of 1889, Brahms composed a group of three motets for double choir. We’re singing the second of these, Wenn ein starker Gewappneter, in which he used sentences from the Book of Luke, suggesting in broad terms that house, nation, and people are ultimately sustained by mindfulness of God. Brahms uses obvious word painting in the middle section, where the desolation and destruction of the Kingdom divided against itself is shown by falling melodic lines, chromaticism, and clashing rhythms. I think we sing these powerful words to warn ourselves of their truth. And isn’t it true that sometimes music can be used to teach us lessons?

Sweet By and By - Arr. Daniel Hall
(Women of Chor Anno)
Brian Hoskins, Piano

Great music speaks truth to you and lesser music does not. It’s amazing how consistent people can be in evaluating this...trained in music or not. It matters not whether it’s a simple unaccompanied melody or a full orchestra. This simple Baptist hymn, Sweet By and By, arranged by Daniel Hall for women’s voices, speaks truth clearly as a metaphor for our need to “arrive” home and the joy of that arrival. Daniel states the melody clearly at the beginning, but then begins a wonderful meandering and sometimes dissonant journey. Isn’t that life? A return to “do” of the scale with a unison B flat never sounded so good!

Ain't No Grave Can Hold My Body Down - Arr. Caldwell and Ivory
(Women of Chor Anno, prepared by April Duvic)

What fun listening to the women of the ensemble prepare *Ain't No Grave Can Hold My Body Down*. Our women emphatically stated they were ready to sing something "not so sweet," as is so much music for women's voices. This one ain't sweet, but it does rock. It also speaks volumes about getting knocked down, but getting up again or finding inner strength when you think the world is against you.

Loch Lomond - Arr. Jonathan Quick
Baritone soloist: Reg Unterseher

Speaking of going home. That's exactly what the men singing *Loch Lomond* are talking about. One of the Scottish lads captured by the English...according to legend, and Lord knows for whatever reason...is to be hung, the other set free. The one to be hung says "ye'll take the high road an' I'll take the low road, an' I'll be in Scotland a-fore ye." He's goin' home! Once again a somber topic, but here we are...singing about it! Why and how do we do this?

Bernice Johnson-Reagon, of *Sweet Honey in the Rock*, says "When we sing, we announce our existence!" We're about to announce our existence even more emphatically as we combine *Chor Anno* with Justin Raffa's wonderful group, *The Mid-Columbia Mastersingers*.

In these last three songs the theme continues...and the question still stands. *Why do we do this?*

Hark! I Hear the Harps Eternal - Arr. Alice Parker

Hark! I Hear the Harps Eternal and *Saints Bound for Heaven* date from the same era, the early 1800's. Both speak of hope. Singing brings comfort and hope. We catch little glimpses of something beautiful. We are energized. It's part of the "enchantment."

Saints Bound for Heaven
- Arr. Mack Wilberg (conducted by Justin Raffa
Brian Hoskins and Solveig Holmquist, Piano

Let's wrap it up! A Chor Anno member, Brian Mitchell, spoke with clarity and we listened in awe this past July when he gave members of this state's American Choral Directors Association profound reasons for the work we do. Brian is president-elect of WA ACDA. I'm not giving you Brian's whole speech or even all of his summary. But he gives at least one answer to the question of why the *Mastersingers* rehearse week after week and why *Chor Anno* members are willing to drive or fly for hours to be a part of this music making. And why you sing in the shower, while driving, while working, at church...and why singing and live music making should be an even greater part of our schools and our community life. Brian urged us to come up with our own reasons for making music an integral part of our school's curriculum, and, for all of us, in our daily lives. Here is part of what Brian said with regard to the "why" we've been asking:

"... because music is a basic survival need for human kind. In the cave, we made fire, ate food, made clothes and shelter, and then created art. When gathered at night, we sang together and it bonded us. We survive the tiger in the woods better together than alone. Humans are pack animals. Music connects us. It releases endorphins like many other basic human survival needs. I believe that there has never been a more important time for the making of music together. Our ever present connected world through the Internet and cell phones actually filters out most of the human experience, leaving us feeling isolated. Most of our musical experiences happen with earbuds on, alone, and passive. Humans need the communal experience. The emotional, spiritual, and physical connections created while singing with another person requires no tools, no equipment, no money. We just need each other and a willingness to express and connect. (Brian Mitchell)

Come Dwell in Solomon's Walls - Z. Randall Stroope

All right now. We've talked of metaphors and we've sung of a few mournful subjects. And, of course, I hope we've honored Neil. Not once should you have been "taken down" by anything you've heard sung or read in my narrative. Even when singing makes us cry, we are comforted. It brings us hope and it brings us joy. In our last song you may choose a somewhat literal meaning for *Come Dwell in Solomon's Walls*, or you may choose, as I do, to simply be elevated by the music and the glimpses of beauty it brings to me, enriching my life. Take your pick, but keep singing.

By the way, if you don't feel you can sing, just hum. I heard it said recently, though, that humming is a gateway drug to singing, so be careful! And don't forget for a moment...it is fun! And keep encouraging and supporting all in this community who sing or lead music groups!

Thank you for making this a special evening for us! Feel free to write and tell me what you think of all this! hkmeharg@comcast.net (Howard Meharg)

Members of Chor Anno

Mackenzie Aitken	Soprano	Boise	Molly Holleran	Soprano	Kennewick
Paul Aitken	Bass	Boise	Solveig Holmquist	Alto	Salem
Shannon Anderson	Soprano	Vancouver	Brian Hoskins	Tenor	Maple Valley
Alison Askeland	Soprano	Longview	Nicole Lamartine	Soprano	Laramie
Twyla Brunson	Alto	Auburn	Brian Mitchell	Bass	Longview
Jim Crislip	Tenor	Walla Walla	Matt Pierce	Bass	Astoria
Paul Dennis	Bass	Walla Walla	Rebecca Pierce	Soprano	Astoria
April Duvic	Soprano	Vancouver	Justin Raffa	Tenor	Kennewick
Eric Edmundson	Bass	Longview	Janet Reiter	Alto	Yacolt
Leigh Falconer	Alto	Boise	Rhonda Slinkard	Alto	La Center
Karen Fulmer	Alto	Auburn	Joe Strandjord	Tenor	St. Helens
Gary Gross	Tenor	Vancouver	Reginald Unterseher	Bass	Kennewick
			Lori Wiest	Alto	Pullman

Conductors - 2014

Howard Meharg - Conductor, Chor Anno

Howard directed choral music in the public schools of Castle Rock, Kelso, and Longview, retiring in 1995. His professional choral work includes two tours with the Norman Luboff Choir and he founded (1982) and sang with Male Ensemble Northwest, not so coincidentally, also made up of choral directors. He is still active in the Amercian Choral Directors Association, serving on the boards of the NW-ACDA, WA-ACDA, and OR-ACDA. He serves as web/editor for the northwest states, the southwest division of ACDA, as well as the state of Arkansas. Howard was awarded ACDA's "Leadership, Excellence in and Devotion to the Choral Arts Award" by the northwest division in 2008. He lives in Vancouver with his wife, Karen.

Justin Raffa - Conductor, Mid-Columbia Mastersingers

Justin is a graduate of Westminster Choir College in Princeton, NJ, where he studied with James Jordan. He received a master of music degree in choral conducting from the University of Arizona. Justin has sung as part of the Berkshire Choral Festival, Spoleto Festival USA, Voces Novae e Antiquae, and the Oregon Bach Festival Choir...along with several other professional ensembles. In addition to singing in Chor Anno, Justin sing with Male Ensemble Northwest and serves as that group's board president.

Solveig Holmquist - Guest-Conductor, Chor Anno

Solveig taught at Western Oregon University where she was director of choral activities, taught conducting, choral methods and literature. She is a member of the Oregon Bach Festival Chamber Choir. Solveig served a president of NW-ACDA in 2010-12. She is the founder and artistic director of Festival Chorale Oregon, a civic choir in its 35th season, located in Salem, Oregon. She received the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in choral conducting from the University of Oregon in 1995.