



VOICEMAIL



REVIEW OF SAINT LOUIS REFLECTIONS

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 it displays the quality of these pieces written for us by some of today’s leading choral composers.

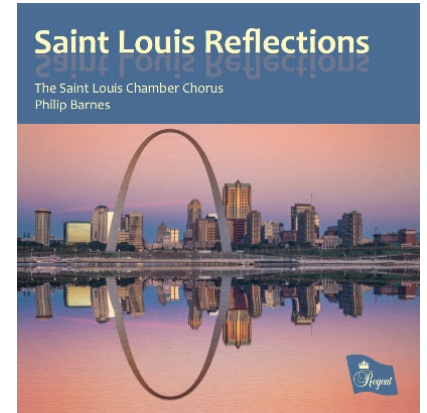
These qualities have already been recognized in the CD’s first review from MusicWeb International, the longest operating and largest online archive of classical music reviews. John Quinn, one of its most experienced critics, wrote a highly complimentary review, hailing the choir’s commitment to new music 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 in the Tabakova *Missa Brevis* she “really tests the sopranos with some very high-lying notes, (yet) the Saint Louis sopranos are undaunted. This is a most attractive setting of the Mass in which not a note is wasted.” 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 (intervening) Rossetti piece is also most interesting. Briggs has a genuine affinity for writing a cappella choral music.” The carols by Sasha Johnson Manning and Charles Collins are “fascinating, skillful, (and with) an innocent freshness.” In David Matthew’s setting of the Roman poet Horace, the reviewer finds “the most adventurous harmonic language on the disc – though I hasten to say that it is an accessible piece. The setting is far from straightforward, but the SLCC give an assured account of it.”

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.”

More reviews for the new disc will undoubtedly appear, and these provide an invaluable resource for us as we apply to foundations, arts councils and charities for their support. Grant-making bodies examine potential recipients to ensure that their claims of excellence can be confirmed by external and impartial experts. Now that the Post-Dispatch no longer supports a classical music critic, we must look further afield for corroboration of the quality of our singing, and reviews like that summarized here fulfill that role.

Philip Barnes



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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT - Welcome to our 69th Season, Opposites Attract!

One feature of our seasons over the years has been the opportunity to visit venues you have not seen or visited for years – or perhaps ever. This year, we are excited to perform in six wonderful Missouri venues where we have never performed in the last 68 years! And, like our theme this year – “Opposites Attract” – the venues this season reflect very different and, in many ways, “opposite” features.

We open the season with “The Sound of Silence” at the Chapel of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood in O’Fallon. This site – the furthest west we have presented a regular season concert – has a richly ornate chapel. The music will demonstrate how silence may be integrated within music.

Our second concert, “Classic Pop”, will be in the Sun Theater in Grand Center. This classic theater setting provides performance space for the students of the Grand Center Arts Academy. It will be the perfect setting for our chorus of trained voices singing popular ballads and “classic pop” songs.

Once again out west, we will visit All Saints’ Catholic Church in St. Peters for our December concert, “Traditions Anew”. The Catholic church setting, substantially different than the Sun Theater, will provide a beautiful, traditional setting for some of the more

memorable Christmas music and carols commissioned by the Chorus over the years.

In February, we will present “Love Conquers Hate” at Kirkwood United Methodist Church. This mid-century modern building, with its gorgeous wood ceiling and whole wall of stained glass, gives warm and lovely surroundings for music that speaks to the enduring power of love.

Our March concert, “Old Roots, Fresh Blooms” takes us to the very different setting of the First Presbyterian Church in University City. The concert celebrates spring, the re-birth of nature and the renewal of both our spiritual lives and physical world.

Our final concert, “War and Peace”, will lead us to Congregation B’Nai Amoona in Creve Coeur. Designed by architect Gyo Obata of HOK, the beautiful sanctuary presents a unique setting for two cantatas describing War and Peace and choruses from Holocaust victims and survivors, which will complement the choral evocations of the best and worst that humanity can bring to our lives.

Please join us for this season’s visits to new, different and “beautiful in very different ways” venues.

Dick Brickson

A WEBSITE UPDATE - chamberchorus.org



*There is so much that happens behind the scenes with the Chamber Chorus. One of these activities is maintaining the Chorus website, which former singer and board member **Amanda Verbeck** has been doing for years. Amanda, a visual artist, designed the current site and does an*

excellent job working to keep the information current throughout the year. Her website update follows:

Aside from the obvious features of our website, like making ticket and season subscription purchases and detailing the current season, the SLCC website has much to offer. In this respect it greatly exceeds the online resources offered by similar choirs around the world, reflecting the element of our wider mission that calls upon us to educate.

For fans of the Chorus, you can peruse an archive of videos, interviews and reviews that feature some of the highlights of seasons past. What can be called its ‘deliberately itinerant nature’ allows the Chorus to perform in numerous and unique venues around greater St. Louis. Distinctive aspects of each venue are highlighted in short essays written by architectural historians, notably **Esley Hamilton**, and these are archived on the website. Similarly, current and back issues of the VoiceMail newsletter are accessible there,

together with brief biographies of present and past Composers-in-Residence and other staff members. Some of these may be heard in our video archive of interviews, which also contains selected performances on film. A selection of reviews is available, and those interested in our catalog of recordings will find playlists and sample tracks.

Singers can also access helpful information on the website. The entire audition process is explained for potential singers. Current members of the Chorus can reference the rehearsal and performance calendar for the year, and well as find guidelines about concert dress code and day-of-concert tips. A list of personnel, including current singers and board members, is also a helpful feature. And for other choirs and those who like to dig a bit deeper, the website includes detailed databases of past repertoire and score corrections. The latter is another aspect of our educational mission, because it allows other choir directors to benefit from our experience. The Repertoire pages show when each piece was performed, which ones were commissioned by the SLCC, and much more.

Next time you’re online to buy your tickets or subscription, take a look at some of the other pages on the SLCC website. You won’t be disappointed!

Amanda Verbeck

Ed: Read more about Amanda in the featured article in the November 2020 issue of VoiceMail.

HOLLY DAVIS - VIDEOGRAPHER AND VISUAL STORYTELLER



Last season saw a new collaboration between SLCC and Silver Autumn Media, in which artistic director **Philip Barnes** filmed brief introductions to forthcoming venues. Videographer **Holly Davis** captured inviting visuals to complement Philip's spoken invitation – and the Chamber

Chorus has entered the world of Tik Tok!

Growing up on a gravel road outside Columbia, Missouri, Holly was homeschooled with her two siblings. This personalized education allowed her the freedom to explore filmmaking and video editing. She used to own a small handheld analog camcorder to create short narratives starring her action figures. In 2001, Holly edited her first digital project on an old Dell computer, which barely ran Windows 98, marking the beginning of a lifelong love of visual storytelling. Aside from video and editing, she dabbled in traditional arts, such as music, drawing, and writing.

Holly's formal education led her to Greenville University, where she initially pursued psychology before shifting her focus to digital media. She understood that the digital world would be ideal for her creativity and love of art to fit into her future career. Her dedication to the craft was recognized when she received the Outstanding Digital Media Creator Award, and she graduated with honors in 2009. This academic foundation laid the groundwork for her web and social media management career, where she has worked to incorporate video content into every job since graduating.

Whether managing websites or crafting social media strategies, Holly has always sought to blend her technical skills with creative storytelling.

In 2016, Holly launched Silver Autumn Media as a side project to fully immerse herself in the world of film creation. What began as a wedding videography project (having filmed over 50 weddings) has expanded into diverse areas such as educational TikToks/Reels, product videos, and performance captures. While she loves filming on location, her passion has always been in the editing room, where a story really comes together in the final edit.

Beyond film and video, Holly's creative pursuits are diverse and far-reaching. Her interests extend to sewing, writing, and painting, providing an outlet and informing her approach to visual storytelling. These hobbies not only add depth and perspective to her work but also showcase her versatility and multi-faceted talent. Whether working with a new pattern or writing out an exciting plot idea, Holly is constantly exploring new ways to express her creativity.

Holly is particularly thrilled about the opportunity to work with the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus. Here, her love of music and video converge to tell a complete and compelling story. Having always wanted to work music into her arsenal of creative talents, this feels like a dream come true. The combination of music and visual elements creates a powerful narrative for her, and she eagerly looks forward to bringing that synergy to this collaboration.

Philip Barnes says that responses to this new method to promote our activities have been overwhelmingly positive, so be sure you are on our electronic mailing list.

SAINT LOUIS REFLECTIONS - NEW CD

The eighth of our recordings for the British label, Regent Records, *Saint Louis Reflections*, was officially released at the end of July. Like several of its predecessors, this compilation represents a selection of our commissions from composers from around the world. The CD confirms our advocacy of women composers, with five major pieces coming from female artists closely associated with us, **Kerensa Briggs**, **Judith Bingham**, **Melissa Dunphy**, **Sasha Johnson Manning**, and **Dobrinka Tabakova**.

With the release of these première recordings, we can expect these works to attract repeat performance from choirs everywhere. Other contributions on the disc reinforce our international approach to repertoire, as they include **Carl Rütli** (Switzerland), **David Matthews** (UK), and **Ivan Moody** (Portugal). Closer to home, it is a delight to hear once again music from a former member of the Chorus now resident in Michigan, **Charles Collins**, whose arrangement of a Finnish carol complemented our voices so well.

The beautiful cover art showing the St. Louis riverfront suggested the title of the new release, as it reflects our city as a leading champion of new music. The CD is now on sale from our website, and Regent will shortly make downloads available through the usual streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music.

Philip Barnes

NOTEWORTHY NOTES

NEW AUDIENCE SATISFACTION TASK FORCE

When the newly formed Advertising Committee of the Saint Louis Chamber Chorus sat down to assess how concert attendees were learning about us, it was immediately apparent that surveying the attendees directly would be the best way to find answers. Our first draft of the survey had an advertising focus with general inquiries around SLCC radio and print ads but we were eager to get to know our audiences beyond the, “how did you hear about us?” question. After several rounds, we landed on the seven questions that would comprise our first ever audience survey which was subsequently distributed at the December 17 concert.

When the results were tallied, we were delighted by the overwhelmingly positive feedback. To our surprise we found that the most valuable insights had absolutely nothing to do with advertising! As a result, we promptly changed our committee name and directive to the *Audience Satisfaction Task Force* and have since been reflecting on the insights learned.

Moving forward, those insights will be informing future SLCC communications and concerts. Don't be surprised if sips & snacks make an encore performance at an intermission this Fall. We know that parking and restrooms are a big deal...that came through loud and clear!

Don't be surprised if we ask you once again to fill out a survey during the 2024-25 season via pencil and paper or QR code for those who are digitally inclined. And while we believe that the surveys are a great tool, we welcome direct feedback either in person, by telephone, or email.

For now, we thank you for your willingness to share your thoughts as we work to make your SLCC concert experiences even more enjoyable.

Deanna Kuhlmann-Leavitt

Barbara Uhlemann

PAST COMPOSER-IN-RESIDENCE IN THE NEWS

After visiting us in April for her latest SLCC commission, **Melissa Dunphy** journeyed south to Cape Girardeau to witness the solar eclipse. This celestial event inspired her to write “Totality”, a new work for the British ensembles, VOCES8 and the King's Singers. They presented it on 21st July as part of the annual BBC Promenade concerts, and thankfully Melissa was in London to attend the première. It was received enthusiastically by a large audience in the Royal Albert Hall, and it may well find its way in due course onto a Chamber Chorus program!

SUBSCRIPTION BENEFITS!

Are you already a subscriber? If so, we thank you for your support!

If not, please consider the benefits, both to you and to us, of becoming a subscriber. One major advantage as a subscriber is guaranteed reserved seating with the best acoustics for each venue, as determined by our own artistic director. Interestingly, it is not always in the same area of each building for numerous architectural and acoustical reasons.

Subscribers also receive a pre-concert letter from the artistic director by mail or email describing everything from an overview and some nuances about that performance, to practical information about the venue, especially parking! Subscribers can also opt in for email updates between performances. There are ticket exchange benefits and a complimentary CD recording – just not the brand new one.

Season subscriptions are now on sale at chamberchorus.org/subscriptions or call (see below.) Prices range from \$190 (regular) to \$60 (students.) Please tell any newcomers to the first concert that they can turn in their ticket to be prorated into a subscription. That's how I became a subscriber! (Speak to one of our staff at the concert desk.)

See you all on September 29, 2024.

Gill Waltman

For more information about concerts, tickets or auditions:

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www.chamberchorus.org

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