



# VOICEMAIL



## HOLIDAY WORKS



The third concert in the 69th season was held at All Saints Church in St. Peters, another venue entirely new to the Chamber Chorus and its audience. Artistic Director Philip Barnes has selected some fascinating venues this season, both near and far, but all are new to our Chamber Chorus performances. Many attending the concert were familiar with

the church sitting up on the hill in St. Peters near I-70 but had never had the opportunity to explore its rich interior. The concert title “Holiday Works” is another play on words of the “Opposite Attracts” theme. This concert, held on December 22, was the closest date to Christmas in many years and the repertoire was filled with Christmas compositions.

What was different and exciting about this concert, aside from the church setting, was its repertoire. Singers and loyal audience members expect to hear a new Christmas piece every year composed especially for the program. What was unexpected was that almost every work had been commissioned by the SLCC over a three-decade period! It is also admirable to see many women composers on the program. Two carols by former Composer-in-Residence **Sasha Johnson Manning** – always a favorite – were performed in the first half: *The Tree of Life*, and *Christbaum*. Past SLCC piano accompanist **Martha Shaffer’s** *If Ye Would Hear The Angels Sing*, and current Composer-in-Residence **Kerensa Briggs’** *Seeking You*, with lyrics by **Charles Anthony Sylvestri**, were sung in the second half.

The concert opened with a work by our own **Philip Barnes**, who took the words of a carol first printed in 1822, and created such accessible music for *The Lord At First Did Adam Make* that he was once complimented on his fine ‘arrangement’ – the reviewer assuming it was a traditional melody! Some favorite commissions in the first half included **Patrick Zuk’s** *Ye Sons of Men*, and former Composer-in-Residence **Yakov Gubanov’s** *The Garden of Roses*, based on **Tchaikovsky’s** *The Crown of Roses* which introduced it. Two other compositions, and a treat for the audience, were also sung in their native languages. **Mårten Jansson’s** *Luciasvit* is a cycle of four traditional Swedish carols to honor St. Lucy whose saint day falls a couple of weeks before Christmas. Mårten is also a former Composer-in-Residence. **Charles Collins** spent time in Finland in his teens and became fluent in the language. His *Joulupuu On Rakennettu* was composed and sung in Finnish. Charles was a former member of the Chamber Chorus.

The highlight of the first half was a new commission having a particularly close association with the Chamber Chorus because it was written by one of our own members, **Carter Datz**. The world première of *Alleluia! A New Work Is Come On Hand* was well received by the audience with a standing ovation. Barnes called it “an impressive and highly accessible piece that is clearly suited to our sound and resources.” Carter’s experience with the Chorus and its use of double choirs allowed him to combine a medieval English lyric with an anonymous French carol, both metaphorically describing the Holy Infant. KDHX music reviewer **George Yeh** commented on the SLCC’s “standard professional level of diligence and preparation, not least with this world première”.

Other pieces in the second half included more favorites: **Bob Chilcott’s** *Before The Ice*, and Latvian composer **Eriks Esenvalds’** *In The Bleak Midwinter*. The last work on the program was the rousing *Good Day, Sir Christëmas!* by **Francis Pott** and ended quietly with an encore, *Rocking*, a familiar old Czech carol arranged for the Chorus by **Stuart McIntosh**, a past Assistant Conductor.

Gill Waltman

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THE SAINT LOUIS CHAMBER CHORUS

## Message from the President - Welcome to our first concert of 2025!

In addition to preparing for and performing the live concerts you enjoy, our singers and Artistic Director and support specialists will get together at the end of February to record another album. The process is long and taxing – in addition to the rehearsals and preparation work, the group gets together over four long evenings to record its music. All of the singers will have put in full days in their jobs and then will put in another several hours in the evening to sing (and re-sing and re-sing... and re-sing) the music.

The general rule of thumb is that it takes at least 3 hours to produce 15 minutes of recorded music. On the one hand, it is hard work at a point in the day when our singers are tired anyway, working toward a goal of producing one perfect version of each piece of music.

On the other hand, at the end of the process, they get to share the final recording of that one perfect version of each piece of music with each other and with you for years and years in the future.

We hope that the recording we make later this month will be available later this year or early next year. Until then, though, you can purchase CDs of the music we recorded in past years on our website at [www.chamberchorus.org/recordings](http://www.chamberchorus.org/recordings). Our recorded music is also generally available through streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music.

I hope you enjoy today's live concert and also can take advantage of the opportunity to enjoy our recorded music from past years.

**Dick Brickson**

## LYDIA HILL



Lydia's musical journey began far from concert halls and opera stages. Raised on a dairy farm in Western New York, her first singing experiences took place in the rural church where her father led music. She began honing her vocal skills in school drama and choral programs, while discovering a passion that would shape her life.

Singing with all-state and other regional choirs convinced her to pursue music as a calling beyond secondary education. Lydia earned a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Music in Vocal Performance from Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee. This gave her a strong foundation in sacred music, classical, and stage performance, opening doors to a variety of musical experiences.

Lydia performed in a wide range of roles in opera and musical theater, from Lillian Russell in *The Mother of Us All* to Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* and Yum Yum in *The Mikado*. She enjoyed roles in musical theater such as Anna Leonowens in *The King and I* and Grace Farrell in *Annie*.

She sang in choirs in different parts of the country and overseas in Ireland, England, and Wales. One particularly meaningful moment was singing Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem* at Carnegie Hall under the baton of **John Rutter**. That performance deepened her appreciation for choral music and its ability to move audiences and connect to the human spirit. Over the years, Lydia has sung with ensembles such as the Buffalo Philharmonic Chorus, and Choral Arts of Chattanooga, and as a soloist in Honegger's *King*

*David*, Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Missa Brevis in F*, Mozart's *Requiem*, and Schubert's *Mass in G*. She was encouraged to audition for the St. Louis Chamber Chorus, while performing as the soprano soloist in *Mass in G* with a Chorus member. Her children were still toddlers at the time, so it was some years before she could take that step, but that recommendation led to her current role as a soprano with SLCC. "Under the direction of **Phillip Barnes**, the Chorus has provided an inspiring musical community where I continue to grow and be challenged as a musician."

In addition to performing, Lydia has found great fulfillment as an educator. She has spent much of her career working with young musicians as the choir director at Fox High School where she currently serves as Chair of the Music, Fine, and Industrial Arts Department. She works alongside talented educators to foster creativity and artistic growth in students. As her own teachers did for her, helping students discover their creative voices has been one of the most rewarding aspects of her journey.

Lydia is also a freelance graphic designer and skilled artist. Recently, she illustrated and published a children's book for her niece (available on Amazon!) Her love for music and visual art often intertwines in meaningful ways. "I appreciate how the St. Louis Chamber Chorus continues to showcase beautiful venues and architecture in the St. Louis area, and I always take time to photograph these spaces during rehearsals."

As a member of the Chorus, Lydia shares in the joy of music-making, both as a performer and as part of a community of musicians who inspire her. "Music has given me so much, and I am grateful for every opportunity to connect with others through song."

**Gill Waltman**

## CARTER DATZ



Carter was born in Little Rock, Arkansas and grew up in Columbia, Missouri. His father, a phenomenal church organist, encouraged him to take piano lessons at the age of four. His love for piano expanded into other musical interests – he studied trombone and was selected

to the Missouri All-State Band all four years of high school. Carter taught himself to play guitar, ukulele, and drums, and experimented with music theory, songwriting, arranging, and composition throughout his adolescence. “I loved developing my musicianship through sight-reading new works and playing songs by ear, inspired by piano-centric artists such as **Ben Folds**.”

It wasn’t until junior year in high school that he caught the choir bug. “One day, we turned off the lights, lay on the floor, and sang Cyrillus Kreek’s ‘Psalm 104’ with our eyes closed. I knew that I wanted to live in these sounds for the rest of my life.” Carter composed his first serious choral work in his senior year dedicated to a family friend who had passed. Hearing his music come to life through his friends in the high school choir gave him goosebumps and lit a fire in him to keep composing.

Carter received a Bachelor’s degree in Music Composition with Vocal Emphasis at Truman State University, and Master’s degrees in Choral Conducting, and Music Education under the tutelage of **Dr. Mark Jennings**. Carter is in his sixth year of teaching choir at Liberty High School in the Wentzville school district.

He loves collaborating with students to create original works. In his spare time, he works as a composer and arranger of all musical genres and would love to move into that field full-time later in his career. His main musical influences are **Eric Whitacre, Ola Gjeilo, Jacob Collier, Bon Iver, and Francis Pott**, who was introduced to him through the Chorus.

When Carter moved to St. Louis, he searched online for local choirs that were singing difficult music and came across the SLCC. After an unsuccessful audition (“they appreciated my sight-singing but had concerns about my vibrato”), he came back a few years later (“with much less vibrato”) and is now a tenor 1 in his third year and enjoying it immensely. He was honored that Philip reviewed some of his choral works and later asked him to write a piece for the 2024 Christmas concert. Philip had a vision for what he wanted in the piece - a modern, dramatic setting of a medieval text with an interspersing of the familiar tune ‘Noel Nouvelet’ (known to many as the same tune for ‘Sing We Now of Christmas’). “I was inspired by the majesty of the mountains in New Zealand that I visited over the summer and set out to inject the piece with that same degree of awe and wonder.” The premiere went off splendidly, and Carter looks forward to writing more music for the Chorus in the future.

In his spare time, Carter loves to play board games, travel, read, cuddle with his cat Tarzan, and create occasionally viral social media content! “And a shout out to my beautiful wife Josephine for all her support and for volunteering her time at the ticket table at SLCC concerts.”

**Gill Waltman**

## A Fourth CD Review – *Saint Louis Reflections*

In the last issue of VoiceMail, we highlighted three reviews of our new CD: from MusicWeb International, Choir & Organ, and Gramophone. Since then, a fourth review appeared in the North-East Post, a regional online periodical in the UK.

Critic **Andrew Palmer** begins his review by asking, “Where have I been? Apparently, this is the eighth recording on the Regent label by the top-notch Saint Louis Chamber Chorus. This attractive album showcases a selection of eleven commissions from the last fifteen years and all premiere recordings that deserve exploration. Reading the publicity material, the Chorus is one of the world’s largest annual commissioners of new choral music.

The singing is superb, well-controlled and balanced, especially in *Briggs’ Out of the Deep*, and *Exaltabo* by Williamson\*, in which the chorus deftly shows

their technical ability through all voice registers. The lower voices are resonant, while the upper voices add a wonderful texture, as demonstrated in Rutti’s *Aus tiefer Not*. Dobrinka Tabakova’s impressive a cappella *Missa Brevis* captures the mystery of the Mass with delight, while the choir adroitly handles Stucky’s *The Music of Light* with wonderful phrasing and dynamics. All parts contribute a strong performance. Sasha Johnson Manning’s gorgeous *Christmas Bells* would make a wonderful start to a Christmas Day service. The compositional writing is delightful. This group’s musicality is striking with strong performances, and the miscellany of compositions makes it a good all-round programme.”

*Addendum: \*Magnus Williamson is currently Professor of Music at Newcastle University in the Northeast of England.*

# NOTEWORTHY NOTES

## Classic Pop – a Diversion for the Chorus!

The second concert of the season with the theme of “Opposites Attract” was held on Nov. 13 in a unique venue, entirely new to most of the Chamber Chorus and its audience. The Sun Theater, after being known by various other names during its lifetime, was re-opened ten years ago after a major restoration, and serves as the performance space for the Grand Center Arts Academy.

And, in quite a departure from his usual repertoire, **Philip Barnes** was persuaded (by his wife, Rachael!) to try something outside his usual comfort zone – an entire concert based on popular music, by songwriters familiar to almost everyone attending – but with a definite chamber music twist. Barnes selected music with memorable melodies and lyrics ranging from slightly sappy (*Somewhere over the Rainbow* – Harold Arlen), to poignant (*Supermarket Flowers* – Ed Sheeran), to dark and disturbing (*Hurt* – Reznor, Nine Inch Nails). The concert was filled with examples of familiar works with new, inventive arrangements enhanced by the quintessential Chamber Chorus sound.

In the first half, two Lennon and McCartney favorites were sung – first, *Money Can’t Buy Me Love*, re-cast as an Elizabethan madrigal, replete with ‘fa la las’, by arranger **Keith Abbs**. By a small world chance, Barnes and Abbs were fellow tenors a few decades ago at St. Paul’s Cathedral in the UK. The second Lennon and McCartney composition was *Yesterday*, a ballad with such a familiar melody that making any modifications must have been a challenge. **Paul Ayres**, an experienced composer and arranger with his own choirs in London, added the richness of a full choral sound.



**Johnson**) that was originally heard over the closing credits for the movie, *Where the Crawdads Sing*.

The skills of assistant conductors past and present was heard in Gretchen Peters’ *On A Bus To St. Cloud* (arranged back in 1998 by **Stuart McIntosh**) and Taylor Swift’s *Carolina* (arranged specifically for this concert by **Orin**

In the second half, the audience was treated to new arrangements of well-known songs, including *Viva La Vida* (Coldplay) by Jens Johansen, *And So It Goes* (Billy Joel) by Bob Chilcott, *Our Love Is Here To Stay* (George Gershwin) by Stuart McIntosh, and *Every Time We Say Goodbye* (Cole Porter) by Sir Richard Rodney Bennett. In these songs and others, KDHX music reviewer **George Yeh** commended the opportunities given to solo singers throughout the concert.

By now, the SLCC audience knows and appreciates the beautiful music composed by **Melissa Dunphy**, a former Composer-in-Residence, who continues to be inspired to write for the talented singers of this Chorus. Many have met her in person at our concerts when one of her commissions is being performed. Melissa and husband Matt were here in April last year at the time of the total eclipse, and again in November for this performance of *Hurt* at the Sun Theater, which George Yeh complimented for its skillful arrangement.



Melissa has been an ardent fan of its composer, Trent Reznor and his band, Nine Inch Nails, for decades and says she’s seen Trent live in concert at least two dozen times. What comes as a surprise is that **Matt**



**Dunphy**, a musician in his own right, is the American webmaster for Nine Inch Nails! This is how Melissa, from Australia, originally met Matt, and she states that NIN was responsible for their marriage, her change in citizenship, and career!

**Gill Waltman**

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