



Edited by: B.T. Sculac Stern

November 2015

Come join us for our upcoming concert:

The Mass, The Dance, The Feast
Celebrations from Bach to Britten

Friday, December 11, 2015 at 8 p.m.

Sunday, December 13, 2015 at 4 p.m.

Immanuel Lutheran Church
122 East 88th Street (at Lexington Avenue)

- J. S. Bach - Fürchte dich nicht
- Lajos Bárdos - Ave Maris Stella
- Benjamin Britten - Missa Brevis
- Dietrich Buxtehude - Missa Brevis
- Orlandus Lassus - Missa Cantorum
- Cecilia McDowell - Regina Caeli
- Einojuhani Rautavaara - Our Joyful'st Feast
- David Willcocks, arr. - Tomorrow shall be my dancing day
- Peter Warlock - Bethlehem Down

Learn More or Purchase your tickets now!

Concert Notes from our Music Director

NAS on tour - Greece

Get to know our members: Robert Thorpe

Concert Notes from our Music Director

By: Clara Longstreth

In choosing music for any concert, I look for contrast in such elements as harmony (sweet-spiky), tempo (slow-fast), period (old-new), accompaniment (a cappella vs. organ or instruments), and mood (gentle-exuberant). In the upcoming program of sacred music there is serenity in the a cappella Renaissance music of Lassus and Buxtehude as well as the Hungarian composer Lajos Bardos, who was much influenced by Renaissance style. This serenity contrasts with the intricate, challenging counterpoint of a Bach motet for double chorus. In *Fürchte dich nicht*, Bach writes long, interwoven lines for singers, punctuated by block chords on a text such as "For I am thy God." He combines a fugue with a chorale in the closing section.

Benjamin Britten is a favorite composer of choral singers. He is also a favorite of audiences, especially for works which have become familiar, like *A Ceremony of Carols*. (NAS limits itself to once every five years for this worthy warhorse.) We have sung nine major works of Britten's over the past 48 years, several three times or more. The *Missa Brevis* is for treble voices, like *Ceremony of Carols*, but was composed much later in his life for the retiring organist and choral conductor George Malcolm, who directed at Westminster Cathedral. Britten honors the Westminster singers by requiring clarity of articulation, treating the voices as wind instruments. NAS women are enjoying our return to this simple yet sophisticated piece after fifteen years.

The NAS Chamber Chorus will sing several short works of great charm: Rautavaara's *Our Joyful'st Feast* has a text from *Hamlet* celebrating the Christmas season:

The nights are wholesome, then no Planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallowed and so gracious is he time.

David Willcocks arrangement of *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day* features lilting syncopation. Peter Warlock's *Bethlehem Down* is an exceptionally lovely carol. British composer Cecilia McDowall is the newest composer to NAS programs; her *Regina Caeli* contrasts massive blocks of sound on Alleluias with a joyful, contrapuntal Allegro Spiritoso.

Come hear **The Mass, The Dance, The Feast!**

NAS on tour - Greece



Photo courtesy of Jean Yves Guilbaud

By: Abigail Kniffin

For the 54 singers, family members, and friends who travelled to Greece in

July as part of NAS's 15th international tour, the adventure began before we even left the United States. Our trip coincided with the peak of the Greek financial crisis this summer: a few days before we left, Greek banks were ordered closed, and a referendum on a proposed bailout deal was scheduled to take place not long after our arrival.

Our intrepid tour organizers, altos Nina Reiniger and Donna Zalichin, helped smooth out the complications. We changed our dollars to euros before departing, and a last-minute itinerary swap ensured that we would not give a concert on referendum day, when Greeks would be unable to attend. We were on our way.

In our first stop, Athens, posters supporting either "NAI" ("yes") or "OXI" ("no") votes on the referendum papered the city, but otherwise there were few outward signs of the crisis. The warmth of the Greek people and the splendor of Greek antiquity, however, were abundant. After a morning tour of the Acropolis, it was time for our first concert. Our program was made up primarily of American music, but we had prepared two Greek folk songs as well, working carefully - and a bit trepidatiously! - on the novel Greek pronunciation. Luckily, we were sharing the concert with the choir of Greece's Public Power Corporation, whose members not only joined us in singing the Greek songs but also helped us fine-tune our pronunciation and style. They then delighted us and the audience with a mix of American and Greek songs they had prepared for the occasion.

After a trip the next day to the stunning mountainside archaeological site of Delphi, we embarked on a four-day cruise through the Aegean. Here, soaking up sun and history took priority: we strolled through the narrow streets and white-washed walls of Mykonos; were wowed by the marvelously preserved ancient city of Ephesus in Turkey; toured the site on the island of Patmos where St. John is said to have written the Book of

Revelation; traversed the cobblestones -- and the beaches -- of the medieval city of Rhodes; visited the labyrinthine Minoan palace of Knossos on Crete; and took a cable car up to the town of Fira on Santorini, perched on the edge of a volcanic crater.

Our time at sea also provided two unique performance opportunities. During our visit to Ephesus, we sang two pieces in the 1st century AD Great Theater, whose exceptional acoustics rival that of Carnegie Hall. And, somewhere between Rhodes and Crete, NAS made its cruise ship debut, singing to a packed house in the main lounge of our ship. If only we could incorporate lounge chair seating and sequined stage curtains into all of our performances!

Back in Athens for the conclusion of our trip, we toured the superb Acropolis Museum and prepared for our final concert. This time, we shared the program with the choir of the employees of the Bank of Greece, who were warmly welcoming and also had prepared American songs in our honor. That night, we celebrated with an open-air dinner accompanied by Greek musicians (and a few brave NAS members who tried their hand at Greek dancing). The glories of the past and the complexities of the present had both been on full display during our ten days in Greece, making our hopes for the future of this wonderful country all the more fervent.

Get to know our members: Robert Thorpe

Editor's Note: NAS is filled with wonderful and interesting individuals. I love to learn about a person's development as a singer, and specifically what draws a singer to choral music. In this issue of Grace Notes, we feature third-year singer Robert Thorpe.

Robert Thorpe was born in a small town in Ohio shortly after a devastating tornado. His family moved west when he was four and



Photo courtesy of Robert Thorpe

set up in Napa, eventually coming by a small farm in the south county about a half mile from the Sonoma line. He attended school about 40 minutes away, affording ample time for singing in the car. Show tunes and The Beatles, mostly - though the repertoire of shows included "Rocky Horror" as far back as he can remember. Fun fact: he gave a rendition of "Sweet Transvestite" at a school assembly on the first day of second grade.

Robert's affinity for performance soon had him involved in school musicals and children's summer theater, where the company director invited him to join her studio; Robert's first formal vocal training. He describes his upbringing as heathen, as such, he didn't get involved with choral singing until high school - and promptly fell in love. There's nothing in all of solo singing that can match the sensation of locking in a perfectly blended chord.

The nineties in the Bay Area was a time of really great, diverse choral innovators - Chanticleer, Vance George, along with American Bach Soloists and Philharmonia Baroque, were leading a revival in period and historically-informed performance. Robert joined the San Francisco Bach Choir in 1997, with whom he sang for nearly a decade. SFBC repertoire is grounded in Bach, but includes Handel, Tallis, Byrd, Handl (Gallus), Praetorius, Buxtehüde, Scarlatti, Rossi, Schütz, and many others.

David Babbitt, the director of SFBC, was a mentor and close friend to Robert. Babbitt's connection to the works of Bach and other composers, was lifelong, deep and unmediated. Babbitt had an excellent gift for sharing that connection with his choristers - people from an extremely diverse array of backgrounds with regard to the Christian tradition, who were able to express and experience the spiritual intention of passions and masses through his interpretation. Robert moved to Michigan for a while, then moved to Santa Fe in 2006. There he continued his vocal training, did workshops with Chanticleer, and had professional gigs. However, the years Robert sang with Babbitt were formative to his musical life and sealed him as a choral singer forever.

View our website for information, past articles, tickets, and more:

<http://www.nasingers.org/>



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