



# Grace Notes

***Newsletter of New Amsterdam Singers***

**February 2011**

Ray Scheindlin, Editor  
Jane Barry, Editor  
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Check out our new blog, [Noteworthy!](#), for an insider's view of what keeps NAS special after 40+ years.

Join us for . . .

**Songs for the Changing Seasons**



**March Concert: NAS Premieres *Dateless Calendar* by Paul Alan Levi**

by Ray Scheindlin

A piece commissioned by NAS from composer Paul Alan Levi, with the intriguing title *Dateless Calendar*, will receive its world

premiere at our March concert. This will be the third work of Levi's to have been commissioned and premiered by NAS, and it appears on our program in conjunction with the composer's seventieth birthday. This setting of twelve haiku-like poems on the months of the year for chorus and chamber orchestra touches lightly on each month and moves on to the next, often without a break. The musical styles shift with the months, from jagged to jazzy to lush, playful, and sober—two movements turn the chorus into a percussion section—always in character with the twelve witty poems.

Chamber chorus will perform a song cycle by Morten Lauridsen titled *Midwinter Songs*, a setting of five poems on winter by Robert Graves, featuring a virtuosic piano part to be played by our accompanist, Pen Ying Fang. The piece demonstrates convincingly that complex, nonintuitive harmonies can create a sound of great beauty. A devoted reader of poetry of all kinds, Lauridsen is an immensely popular composer of choral works who has recently surpassed Randall Thompson in the number of performances of his works in the United States. Lauridsen's *O magnum mysterium*, which we sang some years ago, is an all-time favorite. Like many of Robert Graves's poems, those chosen by Lauridsen for *Midwinter Songs* have to do with the poet's love life and reflect his imaginative connection with snow, rendering the piece particularly appropriate for the white winter

Featuring the world premiere of Paul Alan Levi's *Dateless Calendar*, an NAS commission, and the New York premiere of Kitty Brazelton's *O Joy*, plus settings of the poetry of Whitman, Dickinson and Robert Graves.

**Friday, March 11, 8pm**  
**Sunday, March 13, 4pm**

The Church of the Holy  
Trinity  
316 E 88th Street  
(between 1st and 2nd  
Avenues)

**Purchase tickets now:**  
<http://www.nasingers.org>

For more information, call  
Lauren Scott  
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we are living through this year.

The third song cycle on our program, Johannes Somary's *Many-Colored Brooms*, for women's chorus, is based on seven poems by Emily Dickinson. Somary, who was to have attended and been recognized at our March concert, died on February 1 of this year. He was a distinguished conductor who directed Amor Artis, a New York professional chorus, for forty-five years, and was a longtime faculty member of the Horace Mann School; Somary composed *Many-Colored Brooms* for his wife Anne to conduct at Horace Mann. The piece features a small number of instruments—flute, piccolo, viola, and piano—to accompany the voices with wonderfully varied sounds and textures, resulting in a tuneful, humorous interpretation of the poems.

Thomas Beveridge is the composer of *Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun*, for men's chorus and piano, which we performed in 1987. The piece includes a lengthy and powerful baritone solo, which will be sung by guest artist Robert Mobsby. The text, by Walt Whitman, is in the voice of a speaker who at first proclaims his longing for nature and the contemplative life, but who then reverses himself and rejects this vision so eloquently depicted, proclaiming instead his desire for an "intense life, full to repletion and varied." The piece was originally composed for the U.S. Army Chorus, in which Beveridge sang for twenty years; he himself performed the baritone solo some fifty times.

Kitty Brazelton's setting of six verses from Psalm 77 for chorus and piano uses Renaissance style in its opening and closing sections to express the speaker's agitation in the time of his troubles and his jubilation at his release from them. Unexpectedly, there is a contrasting middle section in gospel style in which the speaker reflects on his own past experience. This work is a compositional tour de force—in which Brazelton's career as a *rock musician* is not at all evident.

All pieces on the program except Beveridge's are new to NAS. Three are settings of groups of poems, raising the question of how a composer goes about assembling texts that will yield a coherent song cycle. Look to the program notes by director Clara Longstreth that will be distributed at the concert for her thoughts on this process.



## Featured Volunteer: Donna Zalichin

Interview by Jane Barry

**Q:** Donna, when I first heard that NAS was looking for singers and asked to audition, it was you who was the contact. How long have you been singing and volunteering at NAS?

**A:** I've actually been singing with NAS for over 30 years, which is pretty hard to believe. I used to work with Scott Gillam's wife, Molly Hazen, who knew I'd sung in college and that NAS was looking for more singers for a performance of Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> with a community orchestra. So I sang that concert, and the rest, as they say, is history.

**Q:** You volunteer in several different ways. Tell us what you do and have done for NAS and why it is so important for you.



**12:30pm** We assemble outside the White House gate.



**1:30pm** We sing brilliantly!

White House Singers" good luck.

**12:30pm** We assemble outside the White House gate and wait for those who drove to arrive. It's freezing and toes begin to lose feeling. We see Senator Thomas Dodd of Connecticut arriving at the White House and Donna Z. greets him as a former resident of Connecticut.

**1:30pm** We finally get through the layers of security and proceed to the green room, and are soon led to the performance space in the Grand Foyer. It's a beautiful space with impossibly high ceilings, a mantel decorated for the holidays and an old, gilded 12 foot long piano, which is not used for our a cappella performance. A portrait of Bill Clinton hangs on the wall behind us.

**1:40 to 2:30pm** We sing brilliantly to an audience of tourists visiting the White House who come

## Diary of a Mad White House Singer

by Jane Barry

*NAS made its debut at the White House this December. Singer and newsletter co-editor Jane Barry prepared this diary of the day. [Eds.]*

**4:30am** Wake up to pitch darkness in Brooklyn and debate with myself whether to take the subway and risk being late for the Amtrak. Decide to take car service just to be safe.

**6:30am** Car service picks me up and we proceed to Brooklyn Bridge. An accident on Brooklyn Bridge causes traffic jam and we make our way to Manhattan Bridge

**7:45am** On time after all, I arrive at Penn Station and meet other NASTers. About twenty of us board the train at 8:00 am

**8:10 to 11:30am** The trip goes well and we arrive at Union Station. As we pull in, the conductor wishes "the

**A:** When I first joined, NAS was under the umbrella of the Bloomingdale School of Music. A few years later, I was on the board when we decided to go out on our own and incorporate as a separate 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. I was one of the first Presidents after we attained our “independence.” Over the years, I’ve done lots of different volunteer jobs – handling ticket sales, chairing the committee that revised the by-laws, coordinating our recent tour to Cuba, and now I am back on the Board. Since NAS has been such an important part of my life, I’ve always tried to help the organization in different ways.

**Q:** For many years, you travelled in from Connecticut for rehearsals. How is it being back in Manhattan close to the action?

**A:** It’s great to be back in Manhattan – and especially to have such a short commute to rehearsals! Since Barry and I have so many friends in the city through the chorus, it has made the transition much easier.

**Q:** Tell us about your work background and the population that you work with.

**A:** I’ve always worked for and with non-profits. I started out doing research and planning in

and go as we sing. Our program includes many Christmas carols sprinkled with some spirituals (My Lord What a Mornin’, Newborn), Bach’s “Drum Schliess Ich Mich”, “Abendlied “ by Rheinberger, “Hodie Christus Natus Est” by Poulenc.

**2:30 to 2:45pm** Back to the green room for a break

**2:45 to 3:30pm** We sing brilliantly, again.

**3:45 to 4:30pm** We are allowed to tour the White House. The East Wing has a Flute Ensemble performing, with all kinds of flutes from piccolos to a huge instrument that Rick Bonsall says looks like bathroom plumbing! The White House is museum-like with historical paintings, antique furniture and beautiful holiday decorations.

**4:30pm** We disperse into the cold Washington evening. I struggle to keep up with Nate and Marcos. We find the Metro and take it to Union Station, have some dinner and board the train at 6:00pm. We arrive at Penn Station 9:39 pm and catch the subway back to Brooklyn.

**11:00pm** Get back home and into warm bed.

the area of criminal justice, working for the Vera Institute of Justice, and then helping found the Victim Services Agency. After we moved to Connecticut with our first child and second on the way, I started doing consulting work, and have done that for about 25 years now. My work focuses mostly on organizational development, retreat facilitation, and leadership transition. I've worked with all kinds of organizations – domestic violence, education, mental health, environmental, housing, and general social services.

**Q:** You were a participant in the White House concert in December. What made that day memorable for you.

**A:** The whole day was very exciting. I'd never been to the White House, so that in itself was a thrill. It's quite a majestic building, and it was beautifully decorated for the holidays. People walking through on their visit seemed to appreciate our singing, and many stayed to listen for quite a while. I really enjoyed walking through the public rooms after we finished singing, and seeing the portraits, and the desks where famous people sat, and the state rooms where world leaders gathered. Even the train was on time (both directions!), which had been a concern. I



## New Chorister: Farah Dib, Economist

Interview by Ray Scheindlin

Farah Dib joined NAS's alto section in the spring of last year, after singing in the chorus at the American University of Beirut (AUB), where she was an undergraduate; at Syracuse University, where she pursued graduate studies in public administration; and in Washington, D.C., where she worked for three years at the World Bank. At AUB, Farah was so devoted to choral singing that, when it came time to apply to graduate schools, she asked the choir director for a recommendation. He wisely pointed out that faculty recommendations carry more weight when they come from professors in fields more closely related to the one in which she aspired to do graduate work.

A native of Beirut, Lebanon, Farah comes from a musical lineage. Her grandfather was a skilled performer of traditional Lebanese music on the

oud. Her mother was once a professional singer who sang backup for the Lebanese star Fairuz, probably the most famous Middle Eastern singer of the last generation. Farah's mother insisted that she take classical piano lessons, which Farah dutifully pursued for ten years, though her favorite musical activity in high school turned out to be singing with a rock band. Many of her older relatives who had attended AUB had sung in the chorus, so when Farah arrived on campus, it was natural for her to join.

In graduate school, Farah took up public administration, hoping to help solve real-world problems by applying economic theory to international development. Her original plan was to return to Lebanon after earning her master's degree. Instead, she took a job at the World Bank, where she first did research on how much access developing-country households have to basic financial services; later, she moved to the treasury of the World Bank, where she helped governments of

guess I enjoyed everything about the day, except maybe spending an hour outside in the freezing cold and wind waiting to be cleared through security. It was a great experience – one of many I've had with NAS over the years.

## **Extrachoricular Activities: Caroling for Good Causes**

by Nate Mickelson

Singers from NAS continued a new chorus tradition of caroling for good causes this holiday season. On Wednesday, December 15, we returned for a second year to provide background entertainment at the Legal Aid Society's annual holiday party at the Synod Hall of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. The event brightened the holidays of more than 500 homeless and vulnerable children and families and reminded all of us how blessed we are to be members of a community of song. Special thanks to NAS board member Robert Pietrzak who made the arrangements and trusted this

developing countries obtain financing and manage public debt. These projects led her to visit many countries, particularly the Francophone countries of Africa. (She has spoken French since childhood, alongside her native Arabic; she studied English in middle school and high school and later at AUB.)

Farah came to New York last spring to work as an economist at the Lebanese mission to the UN. She found NAS by searching for choruses through Google; she liked our sound and found us responsive. She has enjoyed her year with us and made friends in the chorus, but life is now taking her to the University of Pennsylvania for further studies. We hope to see her again in New York and to sing with her again someday. Good luck, Farah!

## **NAS Products**

NAS now has a whole line of products: T-shirts and sweatshirts with the NAS logo, CDs, and our very own cookbook.

Clothing: We have T-shirts, sweatshirts, and hooded sweatshirts in various colors and sizes, all bearing our new logo. T-shirts cost \$15; sweatshirts, \$20; hooded sweatshirts, \$25. They can be ordered at rehearsals or by sending us a message through our website: <http://www.nasingers.org>.

CDs: Our two-disc fortieth-anniversary CD, containing forty-six pieces, is a special bargain at \$20. All CDs are available through the NAS website: <http://www.nasingers.org>. We also have in stock:

*American Journey* (1993), our twenty-fifth anniversary CD, which sells for \$15.

*Island of Hope* (2002), featuring works by Ronald Perera, Randall Thompson, Paul Alan Levi, Ricky Ian Gordon, and Leonard Bernstein, is yours for \$15.

Concert CDs: We have CDs from most of our concerts going back to 1990. A particular treasure is *Choral Classics of Our Time*, the December 2007 concert, including pieces by Arvo Pärt, Gustav Holst, Krzysztof Penderecki, Benjamin Britten, and Trond Kverno. We are making this and other concert CDs available at the clearance sale rate of just \$10 (including shipping and postage). Fill in the gaps in your collection for pennies per song! Send one to a friend out of town at our expense!

Cookbook: NAS's own cookbook, *Cooking for Crowds*, is \$59 for the hard cover, and \$39 for soft cover (plus \$7.25 for shipping and handling). The cookbook is available online: <http://www.cookingforcrowds.org>.

writer to play Santa in his stead.

Then, over the lunch hour on Tuesday, December 21, seven intrepid singers (and a next-generation chorister in a stroller) stretched their vocal chords to the limit to raise \$1,500 for the Salvation Army in the lobby of 11 Madison Avenue. The space was acoustically superb--marble everywhere which carried our voices down halls and around corners--and the cause was good. We're looking forward to donning the traditional red bibs again next year!

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