



Grace Notes

Newsletter of New Amsterdam Singers

May 2011

Ray Scheindlin, Editor
Jane Barry, Editor
Nate Mickelson,
Layout

Join us for . . .

With a Lily in Your Hand

Folk melodies for
the 21st century
and American
works in the
Romantic style

**Thursday, May 26
8pm**

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

Program features
works by Betinis,
Heath, Kilstofte,
Lauridsen, Mechem
and more and the
poetry of Rainer Marie
Rilke, Federico Garcia
Lorca, Dylan Thomas
and Matthew Arnold

**[Purchase tickets
today!](#)**



A Program of Poems and Folk Music: NAS's May Concert

by Ray Scheindlin

Our May program consists of American music written since 1973, with half of the works composed in the twenty-first century. The first part of the concert consists of lush and evocative settings of mostly serious poems. The second part of the concert consists of pieces based on folk melodies that have been arranged and adapted, some in ways that take the melodies quite far from their point of origin, and others clinging close to the original form.

Among the poets represented in the first part of the concert are Matthew Arnold, Rainer Maria Rilke, Dylan Thomas, and Federico García Lorca—an international lineup of first-rank poets. Each composer has sought a way of representing a dominant image in the poem. Dominick Argento's setting of Matthew Arnold's familiar poem "Dover Beach" effectively evokes the ebb and flow of the tide that is the poem's central symbol. Mark Kilstofte's setting of Rilke's "To Music" undertakes to depict in sound Rilke's paradoxical image of music as the breath of statues. Fenno Heath's setting of Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill" evokes nostalgia for an exuberant rural boyhood. Eric Whitacre's setting of the García Lorca poem "With a Lily in Your Hand" brings together flamenco rhythms and a surrealist text. According to composer Morten Lauridsen, his setting of an Italian Renaissance

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Featured Chorister: Rick Bonsall

Interview by Jane
Barry

Jane: Rick, can you tell us a little about where you grew up and about your early musical training?

Rick: I was born in New Zealand . My (Scottish/English) parents sent me to singing and piano lessons when I was six, and I played oboe and cello in my high school orchestra. I was a lazy piano student (!), but obtained my ATCL (Teachers Diploma) when I was 18. I was busiest as a boy soprano, recording 5 albums, touring and doing TV work till I was 14. *Encore*, a compilation album, was released by an English studio in 2003 when I was inducted into the Trebby Hall of Fame. It includes Gounod's Ave Maria, Schubert's Ave Maria, The Lord's Prayer and a few others that have found their way to YouTube. ([Check out](#)

love poem “blends stylistic musical features of the period within a contemporary compositional idiom” to represent the symbol of fire found in this poem and in others of its period.

The chamber chorus will perform five pieces that make use of folk-music materials in imaginative adaptations. In his “Missa l’Homme on the Range,” Mark Kilstofte combinesthe familiar American tune with the Renaissance melody “L’homme armé” to create something that sounds like a Renaissance mass. (Here’s a tip: to catch the “Home on the Range” tune, listen carefully to the basses.) Mack Wilberg’s “O Whistle and I’ll Come to Ye” is a setting for chorus and piano duet of a Scottish song with a sweetly mischievous text about a secret romance. In “Danse, mon moin’, danse!,” a Canadian folk song set by Derek Healey a girl is urging a reluctant monk to dance. The distinguished American composer Chen Yi took advantage of the modal melody of “Shady Grove” to lend the song an Asian accent, with the chorus imitating Chinese percussion instruments. Kirke Mechem’s “Love and Pizen,” with its nonsense syllables and imitation-banjo refrain, carries on a parodic tradition that began with a doleful ballad about a man who died of a rattlesnake bite in 1761. This version makes use of the best-known folk tune associated with the narrative for the stanzas and original music for the refrain.

The full chorus concludes the concert with the well-known spiritual “Let Us Break Bread Together” in a setting by Kirke Mechem and the American shape-note hymn “Long Time Trav’ling,” arranged by Abbie Betinis.

Truly a program of the old made new!

How to Produce a Profitable Benefit: James Crowell Reveals the Secrets

by Ray Scheindlin

In the ten years that James Crowell has been a member of NAS’s bass section, he has specialized in volunteering for difficult jobs. Having been a board member for eight out of the ten years, he served as treasurer for three years, president for two, and is again treasurer. He has been benefit chair for eight years, having personally taken charge of ten fund-raising events, raising many thousands of dollars to help finance our musical programs. Benefits are among the most complicated operations that the chorus performs and are vital to keeping the chorus viable.

James was relaxed after the success of our most recent benefit, the Meet the Composers dinner that followed our March concert, and he was happy to talk over lunch about this and past benefits.

Our Meet the Composers dinners are events following a concert at which the guests of honor are the composers whose works have just been performed. Chorus benefactors pay handsomely for the privilege of getting to know the composers and to dine on a lavish meal prepared and served by NAS volunteers.



James sets the table at our recent Meet the Composers benefit dinner. Photo by Hannah Kerwin.

[the young Rick here!](#)

Jane: Have you sung in other choruses and if so, how does NAS differ?

Rick: Once my voice had slid down, I sang (as bass) in the Auckland University Singers during my undergrad study. I majored in music and Japanese. Then, on a Japanese Ministry of Education scholarship, I went to Tokyo to complete my masters and sang in the choir while at Tokyo University of Fine Arts (Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku). In many ways those choir experiences were not so different from my more recent experience in the NAS. I was surrounded by very talented people, driven by inspiring conductors, and excited by the performances.

Jane: What are some of your other interests and activities? Can you tell us about your job?

Rick: After living in London for 15 years, Tokyo for 6 more years and then Hong Kong for 2 years, my wife Julia and our two boys moved to New York about 14 years ago. We love it here so much, we took US citizenship a few years ago and are now proud new Americans (!). I love biking and keeping fit, but I also try to keep learning. I completed my Deming Scholars MBA here in

For such an event to be successful, the catering and ambience must be elegant and of professional quality. This necessitates a good deal of skill and planning along with a huge outlay of effort on the part of many volunteers.

The first step, James says, is to identify the the amount of money to be raised, as dictated by our budgetary needs and to devise a budget that can be counted on to yield that amount of money above the cost of the event itself. If the event is a low-priced one, it will probably bring in more participants as a higher-priced event, but the yield will not be as great, and it will generate plenty of work anyway. Popular low-yield events of the last few years have included a silent auction, cabaret evenings, and wine tastings.

The second step in James's method is to envision the event from several different perspectives, as if watching a movie. James imagines himself as an attendee and asks himself what a guest will encounter: who will greet the guest on arrival, which way will the guest turn to deposit his/her coat, to get a drink, to find his/her place, and so forth, for the entire duration of the evening. James then goes through the same imaginative process for the workers—the food preparers, the waiters, the performers (if any)—bearing in mind that many of the workers have never performed these actions before and need instruction and supervision. It is necessary to anticipate and plan every step of the preparations and take-down.

This second step might seem to some (such as this interviewer) like an insuperable mental challenge, but it comes naturally to James because he is, by profession, a project manager. Though he typically applies his skills to the field of information technology, he can easily transfer these skills to many other spheres. He also had professional experience, in his distant past, as a waiter in high-end restaurants, which afforded him familiarity with every detail of planning and serving fine meals.

Step three is to find the right venue for the event. It has to be interesting, accessible, within the budget, and, in the case of the high-end events, sufficiently upscale. This step is one of the most difficult, in James's opinion. He approaches it by intensive use of the Internet, personal contacts, and legwork, as each potential site has to be visited in person. In the case of the recent Meet the Composers dinner (as with past fancy events), the space was generously provided by Mr. and Mrs. Rod Perkins, friends of Clara and Bevis Longstreth, whose handsomely appointed apartment on the East Side affords comfortable dining space for fifty.

Step four is the execution, which begins with identifying a group of volunteers. The crew for a Meet the Composer dinner is astonishingly large; just shopping for groceries and preparing dinner requires four to six chefs. It takes four to six persons to do the setup, another four to six to serve, and yet another four to six to break down tables and restore the room to its original state. Tables, chairs, cutlery, and linens must be rented and transported back and forth, all of which demands manpower.

Of course, someone has to plan the menu, and this time that someone was James. Planning the menu begins with studying and deciding on recipes, then adjusting them for a party of fifty. (The conception of NAS's official cookbook, *Cooking for Crowds*, actually derives from our past dinners and provides for each recipe the correct amounts for parties of fifty, twenty, and eight.) For the latest Meet the Composer dinner, James decided on a Cuban theme, which was reflected in the various courses, as well as in the preprandial mojitos and the postprandial twenty-three-year-old rum. (James's maxim is that people should leave a dinner happy, sated, and a little bit tipsy.)

No matter how much planning goes into an event of this type, things can go wrong, as happened at an event a few years ago when an electrical fuse blew minutes before a cabaret performance was to begin, and the owners of the building would

New York and enjoyed a few years at the Juilliard School ('Juilliard at Night' degree course) under Prof. Marshall Williamson. I sing occasionally at a Manhattan jazz club after my work days at Bank of America.

Jane: Rick, Tell us about your experience when members of NAS sang at the White House in December?

Rick: The DC trip was wonderful! I had never toured the White House and could hardly believe I was walking the very halls I knew only from TV shows and postcards. I'm always a big kid at Christmas (!), but seeing the amazing decorations and participating in the musical program made Christmas last year extra special. It was an experience I'll never forget.

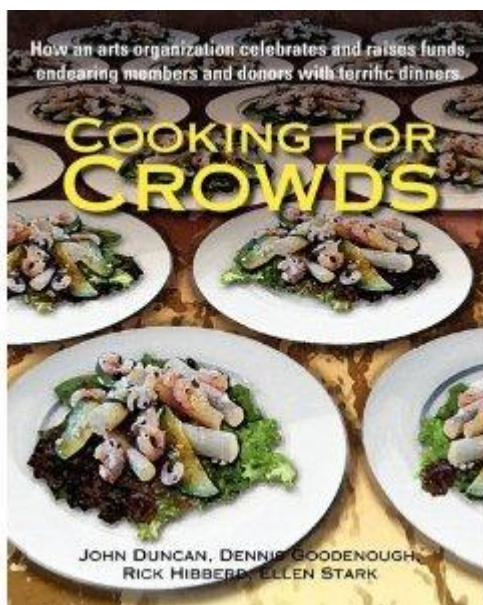
Jane: What are your musical tastes? Do you have a favorite type of music?

Rick: I have many favorite pieces of music, but not one favorite period or type of music. My taste is very broad. I grew up with classical, but learned to love everything from jazz to pop, blues to folk. Also, I have two teenage sons, so our house and cars have been filled with all sorts of sounds over the years! Inevitably, as primarily a singer

not permit anyone but a qualified electrician to touch the fuse box. Then at our fortieth anniversary party—which was not officially a fund-raiser but was planned as an elegant dinner as was the only time we have used a professional caterer—the waitstaff didn't show up. (Chorus members stepped in spontaneously to handle the serving and the cleanup.)

This time, everything went smoothly.

As for the bottom line, it appears that the recent dinner was one of the most successful benefits we have ever had. Together with the raffle that was held earlier this year, we are in an excellent position to end the year in the black, something which is not to be taken for granted. We are indeed grateful to James for his enormous investment of talent and energy in promoting our financial viability.



Cooking for Crowds

Inspired by decades of fundraising dinners prepared by John Duncan and Dennis Goodenough for the New Amsterdam Singers and its loyal supporters, *Cooking for Crowds* chronicles how a small New York City arts organization entertains and endears a loyal clutch of contributors. Since many of the meals were made to send off singers on summer concert tours abroad, the book is also a scrapbook of these trips.

Cooking for Crowds is a full-fledged guide to planning, preparing and presenting everything from a dinner for eight to a cocktail party for 50, with helpful hints on substitutions, cooking techniques and cocktail and wine pairings sprinkled throughout. The appendix is rich with event planning guides, an illustrated list of the chefs' best-loved tools and appliances, and plans for arranging buffets.

[Order a copy for the cook in your life today!](#)

(as opposed to an organist or a drummer, for instance), I find I'm drawn to melody more than the other musical textures, harmony and rhythm. I also go through phases: let me tell you about one. When I was 10, I went through a phase of adoring the harpsichord: but my parents had only a piano, so I stuck steel thumb tacks in every hammer so the piano would sound more... 'tinkly'. Needless to say I ruined the piano, got into huge trouble and got over my harpsichord phase rather quickly.

Jane: You sing in the choir and the chamber chorus. Can you comment on that? What are the differences and the similarities from the chorister's perspective, for instance?

Rick: Undoubtedly, there's a richness in a 70-strong choir, but an intimacy in a chamber chorus. That seems to apply not only to the music, but also to the community. I'm so pleased to have the opportunity to sing in both.

Jane: So you've come to New York from very far away - originally, from New Zealand! How do you find New York compared to the other places you've lived?

Rick: New Zealand in the South Pacific is such a different place



NAS Board Presidents past and present. Photo by Ned Brose.

The NAS Board of Directors

by Ray Scheindlin with reporting by Jane Barry

When I joined the chorus, I assumed, without stopping to think it through, that our director, Clara Longstreth, somehow made everything happen. It took a while for me even to become aware of just how many tasks are involved in producing our programs and, for that matter, just in staying in existence. No one could do it alone.

That outcome requires a lot of input; thus, the board. As longtime NAS chorister Donna Zalichin puts it, the board "depends on having members with a variety of skills—for example, finance, fund-raising, marketing—and we are lucky to have such talented people in the chorus." And, it might be added, we depend on other members who are willing to contribute their time to behind-the-scenes tasks and their intelligent consideration to chorus problems.

The board assists Clara in formulating the chorus's plans and coordinates the implementation of those plans. There are actually two boards: the Operations Board consists of chorus members and meets once a month during the season and once during the summer; the Full Board consists of this same group, joined three times a year by the nonsinging members—supporters, benefactors, and friends who provide valuable counsel and advice.

Board meetings are generally organized around reports by key individuals and committee chairs. Besides the treasurer's report, there might be a report by the tour or marketing committee. The tour committee's reports on upcoming summer tour destinations always generate lively discussion. Reports are also made by ad hoc committees such as those responsible for the fund-raising activities described in the interview with James Crowell in this issue.

Reports by our manager, Lauren Scott, and by Clara are regular features of all board meetings. Lauren discusses such day-to-day operations as dues collection, concert publicity, and concert attendance statistics. Clara reports on personnel and solicits the board's suggestions for dealing with any difficulties she has encountered; evaluates the progress of our rehearsals and asks for board members' observations of the same; and describes her evolving plans for future programming and her thoughts about new commissions. As Clara herself puts it, "I value the board for the creative thinking and idea-hatching that it does, and for giving me feedback about musical matters. I do choose the repertoire myself, but

from New York . My parent's house in which I grew up in Auckland was on a long, white beach, near volcanoes and surrounded by hibiscus trees and native palms (called punga). The population of the whole country is only 4 million. I was so desperate to go abroad and learn foreign languages that when I was little I covered my bedroom walls with travel posters and made up my own language with a friend. We just put an "egg" in front of every vowel, but we became very fluent! (...eggif yeggou kneggow wheggat eggimeggan!). Life in Sydney, London, Tokyo and Hong Kong was wonderful, but New York is undoubtedly the best place I've ever lived.

Jane: And now you live in Rye NY, I believe. How do you manage that with rehearsals on the Upper West Side?

Rick: We moved straight from Hong Kong to Rye , since we had heard of it from friends on the ex-pat circuit and learned that it had good schools. My wife, Julia, is English and she enjoys its village-like atmosphere. As a New Zealander, I find it similar to suburbs in Auckland , since our house is near the beach (on Long Island Sound) and our boys James and Max (now

when I find a text, for instance, that I am undecided about, I have sometimes showed it to the board as a sounding board and gotten very helpful responses." Clara's report is the moment when a board member feels most privy to the inner workings of our organization

The board's chief concern is the ingredient without which nothing could happen at all: money. Much of the board's work consists of creating and approving a budget, thinking up fund-raising devices, organizing fund-raising events, identifying individuals who are in a position to help us financially, managing our endowment, and so on. In this area, the treasurer and the finance committee are the main players, and the treasurer's report is an important element of every board meeting.

Donna provides some historical background: "NAS began as a program of the Bloomingdale House of Music. For a variety of reasons, mostly having to do with fund-raising, we felt it would be in our best long-term interests to become an independent entity, so we incorporated as a 501(c)3 organization, and I was on that original board. Being independent meant that we were responsible for our own governance and funding but also that we were free to solicit grants and donations from individuals, foundations, and government sources and that contributions to us would be tax-deductible."

The board also works to raise the chorus's profile. Current president Nate Mickelson notes: "My goal has been to do things that will keep the chorus relevant and successful for another forty years. Creating a new logo and developing a mission statement were important first steps. Current efforts include the redesign of the website to make it more interactive and the creation of a public blog, called Noteworthy! (led by Marcos Dinnerstein) and the formation of a long-term planning committee (led by Donna Zalichin)."

Service on the board can be demanding, for in addition to attending meetings, many tasks must be performed—some that can be handled by an individual, others that require the formation of subcommittees. Hardly a meeting goes by that there is not a request for someone to volunteer to do something or other. The reward of board service consists merely in the satisfaction of seeing the chorus function so well as a result of all these efforts and of having had a hand in its success. Donna comments: "After an absence of many years, I have recently rejoined the board and am very happy to be able to contribute to the chorus in this way. There's a lot of behind-the-scenes work that keeps the chorus running smoothly, and it's a very congenial group to work with... Singing with NAS has been an important part of my life, so I am very happy to help ensure that it continues to be part of New York's musical scene for many years to come."

Volunteering goes far beyond the activities of the board. As Clara says, "The spirit of volunteer activity in NAS is very, very strong. It can be seen in the many individuals who have taken on certain aspects of chorus work and 'run with them.' I have in mind, of course, Scott Gilliam, who, as chorus librarian, saw value in our collection and envisioned a rental library—he became an entrepreneur, producing a significant financial benefit for the chorus; Bendix Anderson, who produces the annual report; Lucy Kraus, who refines our press releases; Marcos Dinnerstein, who now manages our website and singer page; Paula Franklin, who has served as archivist for many years; Walter Daum, who assists in researching and writing program notes; small committees that have run searches for managers in the past ... and many others."

Clara concludes: "The NAS board is more a gathering of generalists than of niche specialists. We have had many, many board presidents during my tenure, and it is impressive to me to see how many of them are still singing in NAS, years after their board job ended. Singing in NAS takes up a certain amount of time and energy, and many feel that they cannot add on participation in the board. But I believe that those who do find it fun and meaningful."

21 and 18 respectively) grew up much as I did, in a more-or-less carefree neighborhood. My commute to work (in midtown Manhattan) takes only about 45 minutes. The journey home from choir and chorus rehearsals takes longer than that, but it's all very worth it!

We will be electing new board members at our annual business meeting in June. Do consider running for a three-year term on the board. If you are interested, please speak to Nate, Donna, or Jane.

What Type of Choral Music Fan are You?

Visit the Sing New York! website and find out!

www.singnewyork.org



The New York Choral Consortium, an organization composed of leaders of the City's amateur choruses, is planning a massive joint concert for June 15th. They've built a website for the event (see the link above) where you can find a list of participating choruses, a complete calendar of upcoming concerts by Consortium members, information on the Choral Finale and lots more. You can also find the Consortium on Facebook and become a fan for behind the scenes details and notifications of upcoming events.

Participate by looking at the calendar of events and plan your concert-going for the rest of the spring.

Join Us! If you sing in a chorus, ask them to sign up and be listed.

Try something new. Sign up for Experiment! a pass that will let you attend an event at half price.

Sign up for email alerts with weekly concert listings so you won't miss anything.

Attend our Choral Finale on June 15 where hundreds of singers will perform works by Handel, Mendelssohn, Brahms and more. NAS music director Clara Longstreth will conduct the *Kyrie* from Bach's B Minor Mass and Brahms's *Schaffe in mir ein rein Herz*.



NAS Recordings

NAS now offers a range of recordings for sale to support our concert programs:

All CDs are available through the NAS website. Order today!

40th Anniversary Collection (2009) includes forty-six pieces and is a special bargain at \$20. 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!

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