

NAS

New Amsterdam Singers

Grace Notes

Newsletter of New Amsterdam Singers

May 2013

Jessica Wong, Editor
Nate Mickelson, Layout

Join us for

Premiere!

Thursday, May 23
8 p.m.

Saint Ignatius of
Antioch Episcopal
Church
552 West End
Avenue (at 87th
Street)

Reserve tickets
today!

www.nasingers.org

Music by New Yorkers on poems both strong and stirring, whimsical and silly, from Walt Whitman to William Carlos Williams.



A Note from Our Music Director

As one might expect from the title of our upcoming concert, *Premiere*, the program includes many new works, from a world premiere (first-ever performance) to an American premiere to three New York premieres. Of the eight American composers, six are living, and at least four will be attending the concert. The music is set to secular poetry, and the variety in the texts will be of much interest.

We begin and end with light verse. Ronald Perera has taken charming, whimsical poems by David McCord for his piece: *A thing that I love is a fossil/An animal dead is so docile!* The two most recent works are by young composers who have already won serious attention in their twenties. Elizabeth Lim has written a beautiful work for chorus and piano on a poem by Willa Cather, who has reimagined Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Alex Weiser has written memorable harmonies to a haunting poem by a young poet, Laura Marris, for his "Travelers".

Don't miss Matt Harris's exuberant set of variations on "La Bamba"!



Do you follow NAS on Twitter? Have you liked us on Facebook? We hope so, but if you haven't, take a moment to do so now! As the May concert nears and we prepare for this summer's tour, we'll be sharing more on social media, including brief videos from our rehearsals, updates on our performances, and pictures from our travels.

To encourage you to follow us, we'll be giving away two free tickets to our May 23 concert to a random follower on Twitter and a random "like" on Facebook who have shared at least one of our updates with their friends.

Current NAS members are not eligible for free tickets, but we hope you'll share this with your friends so that they can be! Follow us now and look for more details in our Facebook and Twitter feeds soon!

The chamber chorus will sing a classic of the choral repertoire, "Carols of Death" by William Schuman, on poems of Walt Whitman that were surely influenced by his experiences as a Civil War battlefield nurse. He writes: *Come lovely and soothing death*. Richard Rodney Bennett chose text from 16th and 17th century poems, which share the curious image *His helmet now shall make a hive for bees* for "A Farewell to Arms". A solo cello, played by Young Concert Artists First Prize Winner Jay Campbell, has a role equal to that of the chamber chorus in this piece.

NAS has sung many works by Matthew Harris, and we are pleased to be singing two fairly new works of his for this concert. Rather than Shakespeare, the text this time comes from great poems by William Carlos Williams. In "Three Plums", the 3rd movement The Great Figure brings a red fire truck, its sirens howling, its wheels rumbling, vividly to life with ingenious choral sounds. Of "Fantasy on La Bamba". Matt notes that iTunes has more than 150 versions of the song. He writes: "The essence of La Bamba seems to be indestructible... 'Fantasy on La Bamba' is not just me trying my hand at the game, but a celebration of the game itself." Don't miss this great new piece by a master, or any of our May concert!

Q & A with Composer Elizabeth Lim

Interview by Jessica Wong

The music of Elizabeth Lim has been called "impressive, witty, sweetly melodic, truly with a voice of its own" (The Harvard Crimson). Elizabeth began composing at age five, after trying to accompany her favorite cartoons on the television as well as avoid practicing the piano. Since then, her music has been widely performed throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia, by ensembles such as by Berkeley Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, Albany Symphony Orchestra, Harvard Bach Society Orchestra, Palo Alto Youth Chamber Orchestra, ETHEL, Brattle Street Chamber Players, Aspen Festival Orchestra, Brevard Festival Orchestra, VocalEssence, WomenSing, Wild Rumpus Music Ensemble, among others. Her works have also been heard at venues such as Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Sanders Theatre, the Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, and Symphony Space. Elizabeth Lim is currently a doctoral candidate at the Juilliard School.



What inspired your piece "Tempest"? How did you choose the text?

I really found Willa Cather's poem, "Paradox", quite serendipitously! I've always been attracted to poems with both rich imagery and language that isn't too complex

Meet the Composers Benefit

We cordially invite you and your friends to join us at our "Meet the Composers-45th Anniversary" benefit on May 13th. It will be held in the lovely reading room of the New York Academy of Medicine on Fifth Avenue at 103rd Street and feature a silent auction, a live jazz band, a seated dinner, short presentations by three composers on our May concert program, and performances of their compositions. The evening will end with dancing to the jazz band. It will be a great party!

[For tickets and more information, click here.](#)



NAS South Africa Summer Tour

NAS has a long history of international tours. Our first was to Greece in 1985, and our most recent to Cuba, in 2010. In between we have been to Poland, Provence, Turkey, Istria, Sweden, the Baltics, and Spain. This

to set or understand. Not always an easy combination to find, but I came across a set of Willa Cather's poems. I'd remembered her name after reading some of her novels in high school, and I read "Paradox" and fell in love with her retelling of Shakespeare's play.

What did the process of writing "Tempest" look like?

Given Cather's beautiful text, I knew I wanted to have piano accompaniment for my piece, and that the accompaniment would have a substantial role to play in supporting the choir. I knew I wanted to focus on painting the words with music, bringing out the poem's drama. So I really wrote quite linearly, from start to finish, and I charged the piano with telling the story behind "The Tempest", from creating the storm to the magical elements of the tale.

What type or mood or tone are you trying to create and how?

There are so many moods and tones in the poem! Magical, sad, tempestuous, childish, and reflective. When I first wrote it, I was worried that the piece was too mercurial and episodic, but I tried to use themes and motives that would tie everything together.

Anything else you would like to add to help listeners understand the piece?

Probably the most important thing about "Tempest" is the story. Let the choir sing to you a magical tale, and let the music animate it. Enjoy!



Introducing . . . Nathaniel Granor

by Jessica Wong

Nathaniel Granor, a second tenor and one of the newest members of New Amsterdam Singers, grew up in Cheltenham, Pennsylvania, just outside of Philadelphia. He studied computer science at Yale, and spent a few years living in Seattle while working at Microsoft in the R&D department. After moving to New York City last year, Nathaniel wrote a Facebook post asking if anyone knew of a good choir to join. He was then introduced to NAS by assistant conductor and fellow Yale graduate Max Blum. This spring, In addition, he has taken on the role of Assistant Conductor for the NAS Chamber Chorus.

summer, 30 intrepid NASers and 20 loyal groupies will leave for South Africa on July 4. Our five concerts will include performances at the historic St. George Cathedral where Nelson Mandela preached, township churches in the Cape Town area, and an international choral festival near Johannesburg. We will sing with local South African choruses, learn some traditional South African music, and be tutored in drumming. We will also visit popular tourist sites, shop for native handicrafts, sample local wines and cheeses, and spend two nights in a game park as part of the trip.

Nathaniel began taking music classes at age 4. He joined his first choir through a local synagogue a couple years later and has been singing ever since. In college, he spent four years singing with the Yale Spizzwinks(?), a male a cappella group. Highlights include recording CDs and tours on six continents, including a visit to South Africa and outreach trips to a music school in Burma and to City of God outside of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In Seattle, he was a member of the Northwest Vocal Project, which is ranked as one of the top-10 barbershop choruses in the world. Says Nathaniel, "It introduced me to a new form of choral singing with different rules and sound."

Nathaniel has also studied piano, flute, and conducting. He names Chopin, Sondheim, and Stephen Schwartz as his favorite composers and enjoys the close vocal harmonies in the music of Sarah Bareillis and Simon and Garfunkel. His next project is co-producing and conducting a concert in May at his alma mater, Cheltenham High School. "We are putting together an alumni concert to celebrate the 50th anniversary of theater program with soloists, a chorus of 100 alumni, and a 25-piece orchestra."

Now that he lives in NYC, Nathaniel appreciates that "there is always something to do; in no other city in the world is that so true!" He also enjoys pondering the mechanics of the city. "I constantly think about the crazy complicated systems that have formed to run the city, including trash collection, a network of delivery services for food, and how things come together in a city so dense, large, and complex."

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