



Grace Notes

Newsletter of New Amsterdam Singers

November 2009

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

Join us for **Choral Music of Hope and Praise**

Friday
December 11, 8pm
Sunday
December 13, 4pm

*Reception & caroling follows
the Sunday concert*

Immanuel Lutheran Church
122 E 88th Street (at
Lexington Ave)

Purchase tickets now:
www.nasingers.org

Program includes three New
York Premieres,
major works by Bach,
Brahms and Poulenc,
as well as spirituals set by
John Work,
and madrigals from around
the world.

Call Lauren Scott at
212-568-5948 for more
details

Music to Brighten a December Evening

by Ray Scheindlin

Our winter concert combines pieces designed to brighten the short December days with others that take their inspiration from the bleak season itself. Beginning in a spirit of romantic and ecstatic mysticism with Bruckner's motet *Virga Jesse Floruit*, and ending with the exuberant Alleluias of Bach's motet *Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden*. The program fluctuates between the somber and the bright; between a cappella and accompanied; between men's' chorus and women's chorus, full chorus, double chorus, and chamber chorus. There are even three New York premieres!

Among the highlights are a set of three motets by Brahms, two of which are for double chorus; and, from the chamber chorus, a bouquet of contemporary short pieces for the Christmas season by composers of the most varied national origins: England (O'Regan); Estonia (Pärt); Latvia (Dubra); Slovakia (Hrusovsky) plus two by Americans (Pinkham and Klistofte). The men's' chorus offers two spirituals and the visionary *Blow Ye the Trumpet* from the opera *John Brown* by Kirke Mechem.

Two of our December offerings involve instrumental accompaniment. The organ is an imposing presence in Francis Poulenc's *Litanies a la Vierge Noire*, composed in 1936 in the aftermath of a personal tragedy. When a close friend was killed in an automobile accident, Poulenc found comfort and inspiration at the shrine of the Black Madonna at Rocamadour; it was this experience that led him to compose the moving work for women's voices and organ that we will present. In a lighter vein, Abbie Betinis' *Cedit Hyems* features a wayward flute that joins the full chorus to drive away the world's coldness and confusion and to summon warmth and love to replace them.

The work having its New York premier is Kirke Mechem's setting of Wordsworth's famous sonnet *The World is Too Much With Us*. As pointed out by our director, Clara Longstreth, this poem, composed in the course of the Industrial Revolution, is almost more relevant as a reproach to our own age of consumerism and environmental degradation. But any bitterness that might be engendered by the text is dispelled immediately afterwards by Bach's irresistibly joyful *Lobet den Herrn* with which our program concludes.

Our New Logo

The logo that you see at the top of this page, bearing our traditional treble clef but with our initials now in a bold block of color, is NAS's new face to the world, adopted as part of the year-long celebration of our fortieth anniversary. You will be seeing it on all NAS mailings and programs from now on.

The new logo is the result of a collaborative process involving the board and the chorus as a whole. After receiving the board's mandate to explore the design of a new logo, Nate Mickelson polled the board as to what messages the new logo should convey and then discussed their thoughts and the old logo with a graphic designer he works with in the retail department at MOMA. The designer created six draft versions, from which the board selected three. These three were revised and presented to the chorus last spring. Using the chorus's reactions, Nate himself then refined the version that received the most support from the membership.

The new logo also appears on the new NAS tee-shirts and sweatshirts, which made their first appearance at the November 10 rehearsal.

CDs on Sale for the Holidays!

Casting about for small but distinctive holiday gifts?



Photo by Hannah Kerwin

NAS welcomed a new assistant conductor in September, Geoffrey McDonald. In the few weeks since this season began, Geoff has already made us his fans with his winning way of leading our warm-ups and sectional rehearsals. Jane Barry interviewed him in early November. His responses confirm our impression of a musician of enormous enthusiasm who has enjoyed a profound musical education.

Q Could you share something about where you grew up, personal history? I grew up in the suburbs of Philadelphia, near Haverford College, where my parents still live. I'm the youngest of three and my early interest in music (I started piano at 5) was based largely on a desire to be included in what my older sisters were doing. Not too many years later, my enjoyment of music had become self-sustaining -- which is fortunate because my siblings had by then lost interest in the piano altogether. I started 'cello at 10 and sang in the chorus at the boys' school I went to. Throughout high school, I divided my time equally between these three musical activities, school and, of all things, ice hockey (my dad grew up on a lake in Michigan, so that was pre-ordained), which actually leads me to...

Q. What spurred your interest in conducting?

...why I decided fairly early that I was interested in conducting. Frankly, I didn't want to quit any of the things I was doing and doggedly pursue one activity. I was clearly inclined toward music, but unable to decide which avenue to pursue (and I tend to languish during the solitary hours in a practice room required especially of string players and pianists). More than one of my music teachers suggested that conducting would be a way to channel my interests -- both academic and musical -- into one encompassing pursuit. Sadly, ice hockey didn't fit into the equation, so that was out.

Q. Where did you study conducting and with whom?

Following that same line of thinking, I went to Princeton University where I majored in musicology (which emphasizes history, criticism, and theory rather than, say, ear training) and minored in German. So I was able to supplement an abiding love for studying and making music with a passion for other subjects. Princeton doesn't have a conservatory or a ton of grad students to compete for podium time with, yet it boasts a population of terrific student musicians; as a result I was able to cut my teeth conducting as Assistant Conductor to the University Orchestra, Associate Conductor of the Sinfonia, and Music Director of the Princeton Katzenjammers, an a cappella group and chamber choir whose main repertoire is jazz and classical. After that (and until last May) I went to Mannes, where I got a Masters in orchestral conducting, studying with David Hayes, who splits his time as an orchestral and choral conductor. In that respect -- and in many others -- he was an ideal mentor. The rigorous, technically-minded program at Mannes was a useful way to compensate for any training I might have missed while studying at a liberal arts college, and it also allowed me to learn music in a city that seems tailor-made

Our New Assistant Conductor Tells His Story

by Jane Barry

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Consider a gift of our music, as recorded in CDs produced by NAS.

Our most glamorous product is the 40th Anniversary Collection, a two-CD set priced at \$20, containing highlights of NAS concerts from 1968 to 2008. Then come two smaller collections priced at \$15: American Journey, containing twenty-three pieces by such composers as Charles Ives, Barber, and Randall Thompson; and Island of Hope featuring multi-movement pieces by Ronald Pereira, Paul Alan Levi, and others. At last come the true stocking-stuffers, recordings of our concerts going back to 1990, priced at \$10 (for these, NAS will pay the cost of packaging and mailing). Experience the nostalgia of listening again to those lovely songs of old, and share the experience with a friend or companion. Place your order or request a list of available concert recordings by writing Ray Scheindlin (rscheindlin@gmail.com).

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Q. What conductors have inspired you and why?

I am an enormous fan of the late Carlos Kleiber, whose elegant technique and attention to detail never overshadowed his obvious passion and delight in sheer quality of sound. On the choral end, I think I share Clara's abiding love for Helmuth Rilling -- never a rough edge in that tone! I also love Bernstein, as much for his all-encompassing personality and ability to share music with people of all ages and levels of understanding.

Q. Do you work with women's and men's voices in the same way?

I guess I do work with men's and women's voices differently, but I think my overall approach to vocal technique is governed by the same principles. My voice teacher in college also had me play for a lot of his female students' lessons, so I was able to see how the technique that I was being taught was applied to female voice, which was very useful.

Q Do you have a favorite era of choral music?

Toughie! I actually have some isolated favorites rather than a single overarching era: Monteverdi, Bach, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Rachmaninoff, Britten, and a great many 20th century composers (so much astringent, spiky harmony sounds amazingly beautiful with voices!). But I guess this is less an answer and more a case-in-point of how indecisive I can be!



President James Crowell presiding; Clara conducting from the podium; Scott Gillam, Allan Miller, and Babara Zucker-Pinchoff entertain.

Extrachoracular Activities

40th Anniversary Party

In April, we held a party to celebrate our 40th season. Hannah Kerwin was there with her camera.



Our leader, master hiker Paul Parsekian; the hikers at Anthony's Nose; Hannah Kerwin, our faithful photographer.



Announcing NAS's 1st Annual Benefit Run

On your marks, get set, Go!

With bikes chained up outside Broadway Pres and stories constantly swapped about the best hiking or kayaking or skiing, it's sometimes hard to tell whether we're a gym or a chorus. Don't think the Benefit committee hasn't noticed!

So... when spring comes, please join us for our 1st Annual 5K Benefit Run/Walk. We'll not only be raising funds for the choir, but strengthening the community that makes singing with NAS such a pleasure. And bring your friends and family! The Run/Walk is open to any interested racer as well as anyone wishing to sponsor a participant.

We're busy confirming a date and place and should have specifics in early 2010. Start training!

And Then Some . . .

Annual Garrison Outing

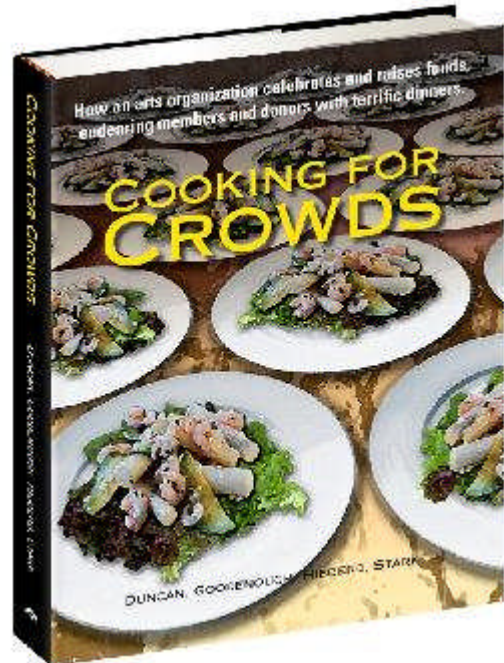
In September, we had our annual outing to the home of Clara and Bevis in Garrison, NY, including a hike to Anthony's nose, led by Paul Parsekian. Here are some photos, taken by Hannah Kerwin.

NAS Cooks up a Choral Cookbook

Interview with Dennis
Goodenough
by Jane Barry

Q. Dennis, when and why did the idea of an NAS cookbook come about?

In 2007, then NAS President, James Crowell asked me for help brainstorming how we should celebrate the chorus' 40th year anniversary. We came up with three main ideas: recognizing past musical triumphs, celebrating the life-long friendships fostered by the group and commemorating the many concert tours and benefits chorus members have hosted.



The 40th Anniversary CD with re-mastered recordings of selected past performances was the result of the first idea. The 40th Anniversary Bash held this past April was a result of the second. The cookbook commemorating more than twenty-eight years of hosting benefits and the concert tours and other events that inspired the menus will be the result of the third.

Q. How long has it taken to complete?

It has taken about a year and a half to complete this project. About half that time was spent finalizing menus and recipes and the rest editing copy and planning/executing the layout. We have to thank Ellen Stark for leading the thoughtful editing and Rick Hibberd for book design, illustration and shepherding us through the publishing process.

Q. How did you go about gathering recipes?

Luckily, my good friend John Duncan kept an entire archive of past benefit information, so sourcing the original menus and recipes was easy. The harder part was winnowing out of those menus for the ones that were most successful and re-testing recipes we hadn't tasted in years. Of course, this gave us the wonderful excuse to host a few tasting parties.

Q. What makes this cookbook so special?

There are three main things that make this book special. First, it's a celebration of NAS, its accomplishments and its loyal army of volunteers, with pictures and anecdotes throughout. Second, it's a cookbook of theme-based menus in which

each recipe contributes to a common culinary objective. Finally, it's about cooking for a large audience, sharing hints and tips we've learned from experience to help you plan and execute a successful party. Recipes include ingredient quantities for 8, 24 and 50 people, with guidance on how to expand it to serve up to 200 people Not that anyone would want to do that on a regular basis!

Q When is the cookbook going to be available?

The book is in the press now and will be available prior to the December concert Just in time for the holidays!

Q How can people order the cookbook?

Copies will be initially available for sale at NAS rehearsals and the December concerts. The book will also be available for purchase on NAS' web site. Later in 2010, it will be available over typical web sites such as www.amazon.com and www.barnesandnoble.com.

Incidentally, NAS now has its own registered publishing imprint, ACappella Publishing, for this book and anything printworthy in the future.

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