
ROBERT DALE CHORALE

Dr. Steven Thomas, Music Director • (570) 586-3921 • www.robertdalechorale.org

Notes

Dear Friends of Choral Music,

Happy Spring! I know it's a little early to speak of spring, and as I write it's all of 17 degrees outside. But just as the trees are soaking up the light of longer and warmer days and preparing to burst into bloom, the singers of the Chorale and I are steeping ourselves in the beauty and drama of Bach's music in preparation for this year's **Bach Festival**. How fortuitous that Bach's birthday and the vernal equinox so often fall on the same day!

These sorts of alignments have been much on my mind this year, as we mark my fifth season as Music Director of the Chorale with an exploration of themes of Time. We began in October with *Time Pieces*, a program that featured concentric cycles of time: works about the seasons surrounded by works on dawn and nightfall.

In December we joined with the singers of the Wilkes University Choral Ensembles to present *Joyeux Noël: A French Christmas*. This program was the latest stop in a choral journey through the Christmas traditions of the world that had taken us previously to the British Isles, Spain and Central America, and Eastern Europe. The highlight of that program for me, besides the premiere of a new arrangement I wrote specifically for that performance, was having the combined forces of the Chorale and of the Wilkes singers perform Charpentier's delightful *Midnight Mass for Christmas*.

The glow from that concert was dampened somewhat by the inclement weather that prevented us from presenting our annual *Messiah*

Sing-Along. While the harsh weather of the season is one reason why it's so important for the Chorale to attempt to bring some light and joy to the winter darkness, sometimes Winter finds it necessary to remind us that we are still occasionally at its mercy.

And now the **Bach Festival**, that sure sign of the end of winter, is just around the corner. The Festival begins on Friday evening, March 20, with a recital of Bach organ works given by **Alain Truche**, Director of Music and Organist at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Scranton. For more on our guest organist please see the article on page 2.

The Festival continues on Saturday evening, March 21, with a program of chamber music featuring the music of Handel and Haydn, both of whom are celebrating anniversaries this year. **Tom Heinze** is Artistic Director of the event, and has assembled an all-star cast of performers from NEPA that includes **Sophie Till**, violin, **Tsukasa Waltich**, harpsichord, **Christiane Appenheimer-Vaida** and **Gayle Klaber**, cello, **Ed Wargo** and **Melissa Lambert**, flute, and **Harold Levin**, viola.

The main event of this year's Festival is the performance on Sunday afternoon, March 22, of Bach's monumental *St. John Passion*. A performance of this deeply moving work would be cause for excitement even under normal circumstances, but this performance is extraordinary for two reasons. First, we are bringing in two supremely talented singers to perform the two major roles: Derek



Photo credit: Pamela Suchy, Scranton Times-Tribune

Chester as the Evangelist and Timothy LeFebvre as Jesus. For more information about them, please see pages 3 and 4, as well as online at the Chorale's website. And second, we are combining the singers of the Chorale with Wilkes University's select choral ensemble, the Wilkes University Chamber Singers. The Chamber Singers have been preparing the music since last fall, and I can't wait to hear how the augmented ensemble will sound!

Last year's **Pops Concert** was so successful that we're not only continuing what is now a new tradition, but we're moving to a bigger venue to accommodate the demand: Shopland Hall in the Scranton Cultural Center. This year you'll also be able to enjoy drinks and dessert as you listen. We are again joining with the Doug Smith Jazz Trio as we present *A Sentimental Journey: Greatest Hits of the 30s and 40s*.

It's another exciting spring of great music presented by the Chorale - I hope you can join us!

Sincerely,
Steven Thomas

24th Annual NEPA Bach Festival

Intimate performances of some of the world's most beautiful music

ORGAN RECITAL

A concert of organ works by J.S. Bach

Featuring Dr. Alain Truche, Director of Music and Organist at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Scranton

Friday, March 20th 8:00 pm

St. Peter's Cathedral - Scranton

Free Admission - Offering Gladly Accepted

CHAMBER MUSIC CONCERT

A performance of some of Handel and Haydn's most exquisite chamber music

Featuring Tom Heinze and members of the Bach Festival Orchestra

Saturday, March 21st 8:00 pm

St. Matthew's Church - Scranton

CHORAL CONCERT:

St. John Passion

A performance of J. S. Bach's masterpiece with special guest soloists Derek Chester as the Evangelist and Timothy LeFebvre as Jesus

Featuring the Robert Dale Chorale, the Wilkes University Chamber Singers, and the Bach Festival Orchestra, Sophie Till, Concertmaster

Sunday, March 22nd 3:00 pm

St. Matthew's Church - Scranton

For Tickets and Information

(570) 586-3921 or www.robertdalechorale.org

Prices: \$15 general admission, \$12 seniors or WVIA members, \$7 students

We would like to thank Linda Hickernell for chairing the Pasta Dinner in November, one of our major fundraising events for the year. Patrons were entertained by Chorale singers while they enjoyed pasta prepared by chef Debby Walsh and her kitchen staff. Seven lucky winners took home delightful baskets donated by the Chorale board and singers. Thanks to all who supported this event.



Spotlight on... Alain Truche

Q: *What organ pieces are you performing in the Bach Festival? Why did you choose these?*

A: I am going to perform as bookends the Prelude and Fugue in B minor, BWV 544 and the Prelude and Fugue in E minor *Wedge*, BWV 548. I chose these two major free works because of their stylistic similarities, especially in the preludes of both pieces. They both showcase the full sound of the organ and remarkable invention from Bach. I also chose these pieces because BWV 544 is one of the first major works I learned, and BWV 548 is the most recent free work of Bach that I have learned. So as far as my personal life, they both represent something old and something new.

In the middle of the program, I am also performing something old and something new but in a different manner. The Partita on *Sei gegrüßet, Jesu gütig*, BWV 768 (Hail to you, kind Jesus) started as an early work from Bach's late adolescent years. He revised and expanded that work into its present form with 11 variations on the chorale. The additional variations show Bach's mastery in setting chorales for the organ and include the pedal, unlike the earlier variations that are written for the manuals only. The other piece I will be performing (so third in the line up if you keep track) will be the Canonic Variations on *Von Himmel hoch, da komm ich her*, BWV 769a (From Heaven Above to Earth I Come). This piece is also a set of variations like the partita, but it was written close to the end of his life and reflects his passion for canonic writing of that time. Together, these two sets of variations will show the colors of the organ as opposed to the bookend pieces that will feature the full sound of the organ.

Q: *How did a native Frenchman end up in Scranton, Pennsylvania? What brought you to the United States?*

A: I came to Scranton because I was offered the position of Director of Music/Organist at Covenant Presbyterian Church on the corner of Madison and Olive Street. This is my first full-time job out of a long road to getting my Doctor of Musical Arts degree, and Covenant was kind enough to give me a chance.

I first moved to the United States with my parents when I was 13, because my father was transferred for five years to Midland, MI. Now they are back in France, but I stayed, mostly because it would have been very hard to reenter the French system, especially in music. I also had begun my organ studies with my original organ professor and I wished to start my undergraduate studies with him.

Q: *Is there anything you'd like to add?*

A: Well, I am excited to share an all-Bach organ concert playing on the fine instrument at St. Peter's Cathedral. The design of that organ is made for that kind of music, so it will be a thrill for me to play on such an instrument. 🎵



Spotlight on... *Derek Chester*

Q: When did you first sing the role of the Evangelist in the St. John Passion?

A: I first performed the St. John Passion Evangelist while I was in grad school at Yale University. It was my second year of the early music voice program (now called the Yale Voxtet). The performances were of the second version of the Passion (1725), sung by the Yale Voxtet as the soloists, and Yale's professional student choir, Schola Cantorum led by Simon Carrington, and the Yale Collegium Players led by Robert Mealy. The live concerts were recorded, produced and released on a commercial label (ReZound), and a documentary about our production and the theological and musical significance

of the 1725 version is forthcoming, being distributed by W.W. Norton.

Q: What's your favorite role to sing?

A: The St. John Evangelist is most definitely my favorite role to sing, and I expect it will be for a long time. It means so much to me because it made me realize WHY I sing. The learning curve is very difficult, and I started it a year in advance. I received an invitation from Sir David Willcocks and his wonderful wife Rachel to stay at their home in Cambridge for a week after a Schola Cantorum tour. That week, I began to immerse myself into the role like I've never done before. In my down time, which was very little, I enjoyed watching football (soccer) with Sir David and singing and attending evensongs and compline services at the various colleges. I always think fondly about that week as the week I "became" a professional musician instead of "studying to become one." When I returned to Yale in the fall, I began formally training the role with my voice teacher James Taylor, who

has made quite a name for himself singing Evangelist roles all over the world, with leading conductors and orchestras. It was a difficult and arduous process, but the work definitely paid off.

Understanding Bach's recitative writing, his dramatic pacing, and the sheer significance of the texts is vital for tenors and conductors who undertake this piece. After learning the role, the Christmas Oratorio and St. Matthew Passion Evangelists were much easier to learn, though they each present their own challenges.

Q: How did you get into singing? When did you decide to pursue music as a profession?

A: Singing has always been my passion. I've always been an avid listener of classical music. Since I was 7 or 8, it's almost all I listened to. Although I'm the only classically trained musician in my family, I was constantly surrounded by music. My brothers and my mother are both excellent instrumentalists, and constantly exposed me to all kinds of music. I always knew it was going to be my life. I never questioned it. I don't have a back up plan. ♪

Chamber Music Concert - Handel/Haydn Anniversary Concert

One of the highlights of the Festival for many audience members is the Chamber Music Concert, which will be held on Saturday, March 21 at 8:00 pm. The intimate setting of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Scranton provides a beautiful venue to hear some of NEPA's best performers.

The program will focus on the music of Handel and Haydn in their special anniversary years. Oboist **Tom Heinze** is serving as artistic director for this event. Tom spends his springs and summers playing chamber music in Seeley's Bay, Ontario, and much prefers being part of a small ensemble to playing

in a symphony orchestra. That's one reason Tom has been part of the Festival since 1992. "This event has a lot of potential in engaging audiences. With chamber music, we have the ability to personalize each performance. Each time out is fresh and new." In taking over the chamber event, he also wants to attract younger instrumentalists to attend. He chose to play the Handel Sonata in C minor, because it was the audition piece for oboe students wishing to participate in PMEA district band and orchestra. "It will be a familiar piece to them, but I hope to give it my own special interpretation."

Other works will include a string trio by Haydn, the London Trios by Haydn for two flutes and cello, Handel's Air from the Water Music Suite for flute and strings, and a Trio Sonata by Handel. Tom is particularly excited about the Passacaglia by Handel transcribed by J. Halvorsen, which will be performed by concertmaster **Sophie Till** and cellist **Christiane Appenheimer-Vaida**. "It should be a beautiful piece," he notes, "as will the other works on the evening's program." ♪



Spotlight on... *Timothy Lefebvre*

western Pennsylvania, and singing was "what we did" growing up. After singing in two high school musicals (Cornelius in *Hello Dolly!* and Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*), I knew I wanted to go to school for music, but didn't discover opera until I arrived at Carnegie Mellon for my undergraduate education. After graduation, I stayed in Pittsburgh and was fortunate to get lots of concert work along with my early training in opera with Opera Theater of Pittsburgh with my mentor, Mildred Miller Posvar.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to add?

A: I am very fortunate to be able to do what I love! My schedule is a crazy balance of full-time teaching at Binghamton University, a mixture of concert and opera performances all over the country, and precious time with my family. ♪

Q: When did you first sing the role of Jesus in the St. John Passion?

A: The first time was with the Robert Dale Chorale in 2001. I most remember the rehearsal process in the church — we were able to spend some quality time preparing all of the recitatives, and we made the decisions together as an ensemble. So often there is not that type of

collaboration in the rehearsal process.

Q: What's your favorite role to sing?

A: My favorite role is Verdi's *Rigoletto*. I have had the wonderful luxury of singing three different productions, and I continue to grow with the vocal and dramatic challenges of this demanding role. Not only is the music well written for the voice, but the pacing of the role is incredible. Verdi was a master in his knowledge of the voice.

Q: How did you get into singing? When did you decide to pursue music as a profession?

A: Singing was always a part of my life. My mother was a vocal music teacher in the secondary schools in

The RDC Quartet provided holiday entertainment at Patsel's Restaurant for three evenings in December. Those interested in booking the ensemble should contact the Chorale office at 586-3921.

A Sentimental Journey:
Greatest Hits of the 30s and 40s

Friday, April 24, 2009
7:30 p.m.

Shopland Hall at the
Scranton Cultural Center

For Tickets and Information
(570) 586-3921 or
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Robert Dale Chorale

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