
ROBERT DALE CHORALE

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

Notes

Dear Friends of Choral Music,

It may not have felt much like winter the past few months, and March may not bring the usual feeling of relief from the bitter cold of January and February, but the month of March will still bring the music of Bach to northeastern Pennsylvania! The singers of the Chorale, the members of the Bach Festival Orchestra, Tom Heinze and I have all been busy with our preparations for the 27th Annual NEPA Bach Festival, and I can't wait for it to get here! This year's festival includes:

- ~ an Organ Concert featuring Stephen Williams, who is Director of Music and Organist at St. John's Lutheran Church in Allentown and also College Organist, Director of Chapel Music, and Visiting Lecturer in Music at Muhlenberg College
- ~ a Chamber Music Concert that celebrates the 300th birthday of Frederick the Great by featuring music written by J. S. Bach, C. P. E. Bach and J. J. Quantz for Frederick's court
- ~ a Choral Concert that features two of J. S. Bach's greatest masterworks, the cantata "Ein Feste Burg ist Unser Gott" and the motet "Jesu, Meine Freude"

It's going to be a great Festival, and I know you'll want to experience it all!

I am very excited to be able to present our guest organist, Stephen Williams, to our Bach Festival audience. Mr. Williams has a consummate knowledge of the music of Bach, having performed Bach's complete organ works over a series of concerts in 2001-2002 and again in the summer of 2004. For more on Mr. Williams and the program he will be presenting, please see the articles later in this newsletter.

Please also note that the Organ Concert will take place in Elm Park United Methodist Church in Scranton.

Frederick the Great was one of the major patrons of music in Bach's time, which is why his 300th birthday is worthy of celebration. Bach's celebrated "Musical Offering" was written for him, and the Chamber Concert will feature selections from that work as well as a symphony and a trio sonata written by Bach's son C. P. E. Bach. Also on the program is a flute concerto, composed by Johann Joachim Quantz, that will feature Ed Wargo.

The Bach Festival concludes with a Choral Concert filled with masterpieces. "Ein Feste Burg ist Unser Gott" is one of Bach's greatest cantatas, and "Jesu, Meine Freude" is perhaps his most brilliant motet. Working on these pieces has made me and the Chorale's singers emphatically aware of both the demands and the deep rewards found in the best of Bach's choral music.



Photo credit: Pamela Suchy, Scranton Times-Tribune

Also on the program are Bach's cantata "Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ," which features one of my favorite Bach bass arias, and motets by Schütz and Mendelssohn. Featured soloists for the performance are Kathy Brink, Larry Hickernell, Gina Lupini, Alene Olsommer, and Charles Unice.

We finish the season in April with our annual Pops Concert, "The Great American Songbook." We will again be collaborating with the Doug Smith Jazz Trio, and I am delighted to be able to include an interview with Doug Smith in this year's newsletter.

We will also be having a special fundraiser on May 24th that will be hosted by Patsel's in Clarks Summit. Save the date, stay tuned for more details, and I hope to see you there and at all of our concerts this spring!

Sincerely,

Steven Thomas



Spotlight on... Stephen Williams

Each year, the NEPA Bach Festival showcases a gifted regional organist, and this year is no exception. On Saturday, March 17th at 4:00 pm, the Robert Dale Chorale will proudly present Allentown-area organist Stephen Williams, who will add the sanctuary of Elm Park United Methodist Church, Scranton to his lengthy list of concert venues.

When asked about his program, Mr. Williams explained that it will be comprised of the kinds of pieces that should be included in every Bach organ recital. That said, in accordance with the theme of the festival as well as the possibility that some of his

audience may be first-time organ recital attendees, he decided to primarily perform a variety of Bach standards.

The recital begins with the *Toccata in F Major*, a wonderful performance piece, both on the surface and in depth. It includes pleasing canons, impressive pedal work, majestic chords, striking modulations, and hypnotic rhythms—a truly thrilling listening experience for any audience member. Also included is the *Passacaglia in C Minor*, which is in a category of compositions inspired by dance, another prominent art form from the Baroque period. This work encompasses an intertwining of styles, from chorales to string writing to arpeggios, and culminates in the Fugue. In this important and powerful piece, Mr. Williams sees an “incredible display of perfection in every conceivable way.” In contrast, *The Schübler Chorales* he will play are of a much simpler style. They were derived from chorale settings previously written by Bach for his cantatas, using only the chorale melody and minimal ornamentation.

Finally, for those who expect him to pull out all the stops, Mr. Williams will perform a personal favorite, *Fantasia on B-A-C-H*. A massive and majestic work, it was written in 1900 by German composer Max Reger, out of respect for, and in tribute to, Bach. With its diverse dynamics and astounding harmonies, it is revered as a masterpiece of Romantic organ music.

Mr. Williams’ selection of this final work on the program speaks to his musical psyche. From this same era, French organ compositions of the late 19th and early 20th century are a genre that he relates to deeply, finding their sounds to be “very honest, grounded, and exciting.” And, lest the reader think his musical interests begin and end with the organ, he also admits to being “a choral nut, too,” commenting that “nothing is as moving or thrilling as a great choir accompanied by a great orchestra (and maybe organ!).”

It seems a given that Stephen Williams will make the perfect complement to the Robert Dale Chorale’s Bach Festival weekend. ♪

STEPHEN WILLIAMS is Director of Music and Organist at St. John’s Lutheran Church in center-city Allentown, Pennsylvania, and concurrently College Organist, Director of Chapel Music, and Visiting Lecturer in Music at Muhlenberg College. His summa cum laude undergraduate and graduate degrees are from Brevard College and West Chester University, and he has completed extensive degree work and organ study at Westminster Choir College of Ryder University and The Juilliard School. His organ instructors include Marilyn Keiser, Adelaide Miller, Donald McDonald, Jon Gillock, Stefan Engels, and Anita Greenlee. He is the recipient of a number of academic merit awards including the Lomench Organ Scholarship, Linares Organ Award, Clark Organ Scholarship, McClure Organ Scholarship, and the Elaine Isaacson Brown Award in Conducting.

He is also a prize winner in two American Guild of Organists Chapter competitions and the Arthur Poister Organ Playing Competition. He is founder and coordinator of the Arts at St. John’s annual concert series, where he introduced to the community ongoing popular weekday Noon-Ten Concerts, Christmas Day Organ Noëls, and has performed nearly one hundred solo organ recitals. In 2001-02, he performed the entire organ works of J. S. Bach in eighteen recitals using nine prominent Lehigh Valley pipe organs. He repeated this feat to critical acclaim during the summer of 2004. He has also performed and lectured on the complete organ works of Johannes Brahms, the six symphonies of Louis Vierne, and the early works of Olivier Messiaen. Stephen maintains an active concert schedule, having performed in many notable venues in the US, Canada, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and France.

Locally, he has been a repeat guest artist at Musikfest of Bethlehem, Music in the Old Moravian Chapel in Bethlehem, the annual LVAGO Bach Marathon, Music from St. Stephen’s and WVIA Radio in Scranton, and Lenten Recitals at First Presbyterian, Allentown. As an accompanist, conducting assistant and vocal coach, he has worked with the Symphonic Choir, Westminster Choir, and Schola Cantorum of Westminster Choir College, the Juilliard School choral and vocal arts, Lehigh University Choir and Choral Union, Gloria Dei Chorale of Allentown, Cathedral Choral Society and Concord Chamber Singers of Bethlehem, Camerata Singers of Allentown, the Muhlenberg Musical Theatre Department, and he has recorded extensively for Shawnee Press and Warner Brothers music publishers. In 2011, he appeared as concerto soloist with the Monocacy Chamber Orchestra

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Spotlight on... *Doug Smith*

Friday, April 20th at 8 pm in Shopland Hall of the Scranton Cultural Center, will feature Doug on upright acoustic bass. An accomplished player of jazz, Dixieland, swing, and blues, he has been making his way in NEPA since 1968 as a full-time musician, playing concerts and night clubs, or conducting residencies at public schools and universities.

The things he enjoys most about his work are the totally-improvised solo spots as well as “the intimate interaction with other musicians.” Doug also gets involved behind the scenes of live music by producing Nay Aug Park’s Sunday Concert Series and serving on the executive committees of the Scranton Jazz Festival and First Night, Scranton. He’s not averse to getting in front of the scenes either, as he leads the Dixieland All-Stars Band and the House Orchestra at Skytop Lodge in the Poconos. By all indications, this guy is good... and busy.

Still, he manages to keep the Chorale’s Pops concert on his agenda and, when asked what he enjoys about that, he’ll tell you he loves to work with the vocalists. He explains the challenges and rewards of being a good accompanist to all the different voice types—of how you can’t be rigid, but rather have to bend and blend. The key is to “do a good job artistically,” by giving just the right amount of support, “without overpowering the singer.” He further shares that he is a big fan of a capella singing which just happens to utilize his favorite (and the world’s first!) musical instrument – the human voice. Who would have thought?

Doug also dabbles in photography and enjoys video and audio documenting. He resides in Dunmore with cat Duchess, and the Chorale hopes he keeps it that way.

That must be one cool cat. 🎵

DOUG SMITH - RDC partner in the promotion of live music in NEPA

Since the inception of the Robert Dale Chorale Pops concert four years ago, the Doug Smith Trio has been part of the show. One could say that the success of this particular program largely rests on the musically-capable shoulders of the Trio’s namesake, Doug Smith.

This year’s concert, *The Great American Songbook*, to be held on

27th Annual NEPA Bach Festival

Celebrating the music of J.S. Bach and his contemporaries with three concerts over two days

ORGAN CONCERT

A concert of organ works by J.S. Bach

Featuring Stephen Williams, Director of Music and Organist at St. John's Lutheran Church, Allentown

Saturday, March 17th 4:00 pm

Elm Park United Methodist Church - Scranton

Free Admission - Offering Gladly Accepted

CHAMBER MUSIC CONCERT

Celebrating Frederick the Great's 300th Birthday

Featuring Tom Heinze, Ed Wargo, and the Bach Festival Orchestra

Saturday, March 17th 8:00 pm

St. Luke's Episcopal Church - Scranton

CHORAL CONCERT

Bach's "Ein Feste Burg is Unser Gott" and "Jesu, Meine Freude"

Featuring the Robert Dale Chorale and the Bach Festival Orchestra, under the direction of Dr. Steven Thomas

Sunday, March 18th 3:00 pm

St. Luke's Episcopal Church - Scranton

For Tickets and Information:

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

Chamber and Choral Music Concerts:

\$15 general admission

\$12 seniors or WVIA members

\$ 7 students

Free for children under 12 when accompanied by a parent



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Lackawanna County

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and the SATORI chamber ensemble performing works of Barber, Rheinberger, Handel, Bédard, Brixi and Poulenc, and as guest artist with the Philadelphia Brass. In 2006, Stephen received the City of Allentown's *Arts Ovation Award* for noted excellence in performance and community artistic achievement, and is the only organist to have received this award. He is a past-Dean of the Lehigh Valley Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, having served three consecutive terms. He enjoys traveling home to South Carolina about twice a year to visit his folks, and without too much arm-twisting, usually ends up playing services and concerts for his sister who is director of music and organist in a prominent Charleston church. ♪

May 24, 2012
Special Event Fundraiser
at Patsel's Restaurant
in Clarks Summit

Robert Dale Chorale

301 Tulip Circle • Clarks Summit PA 18411
(570) 586-3921 • www.robertdalechorale.org

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

The Great American Songbook ~ with the Doug Smith Jazz Trio

Friday, April 20, 2012

8:00 pm

Shopland Hall at the
Scranton Cultural Center

Tickets:

\$15 General admission

\$12 Senior Citizen/WVIA members

\$ 7 Students

Free for children under 12

accompanied by a parent



The Chorale's newest tradition:

The Doug Smith Jazz Trio joins the Chorale in a cabaret-style program

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