



Grace Notes

Newsletter of the New Amsterdam Singers

Lauren Scott, Editor

Nate Mickelson, Layout

Join us for our March Concert!

Journeys and Elegies
Midcentury
Masterpieces for
Chorus and Orchestra

Friday, Mar. 13th
8 p.m.

Sunday, Mar. 15th
4 p.m.

Purchase tickets now:

www.nasingers.org

The Church of the Holy Trinity
316 East 88th Street
(between First and Second Avenues)

Music by Britten, Corigliano, Finzi, Harbison, and Holst with Chamber Orchestra and Soloists



NAS's March Concert Features Works for Chorus, Orchestra, and Soloists

by

Ray Scheindlin

NAS's March concert features works for chorus, orchestra, and soloists. This rare break with our tradition of mostly a cappella performance is intended as a birthday present to ourselves and our audiences in celebration of our forty years of choral singing. Five major works—one, a Pulitzer Prize winner—by leading composers of the twentieth century, make up the program, which offers settings of particularly interesting and intricate texts, both sacred and profane.

Fern Hill, by John Corigliano, is a tuneful setting of a nostalgic poem by Dylan Thomas evoking the memory of a happy and carefree youth on a farm in Wales. Sunny music for the chorus and orchestral effects, such as French horns imitating the barking of foxes, paint the scenes vividly before us. The alternations of the full chorus, semi-chorus, solo chorus, and the lone voice of the mezzo-soprano soloist create varied musical textures matching the ebb and flow of the poet's nostalgic memories. This lovely piece was one of Corigliano's first major compositions, written when he was only twenty-two years old and dedicated to the music teacher at Midwood High School who encouraged him to take up music as a career.

Diana Solomon-Glover, *Soprano*
Mary Ann Hart, *Mezzo-Soprano*
Scott Murphree, *Tenor*
Tyler Duncan, *Baritone*

Tickets, \$20; seniors and students, \$15

TDF accepted
For more information, call
Amy Harrison at (212)
842-1511

We're having a party!

By James Crowell, NAS President

On the evening of Saturday, April 18th, we are holding a gala bash to celebrate NAS's 40th anniversary at the elegant Prince George Ballroom in NYC. This is not a "benefit" to raise money; instead, it is a PARTY for our current and past chorus members as well as our supporters. We are eager to have everyone in the chorus attend, so mark your calendars now!

We'll have plenty of food, drink, dancing and singing (don't worry, no rehearsals necessary). We'll also have a tribute to Clara and the last 40 years of making glorious music together! So come and see your old friends, reminisce and carouse the night away!

We want everyone to be able to come, so while the ticket price is \$75, you have the option to "pay what you can" with a suggested minimum of \$25. For those wishing to help support the costs of the event, there is

More intimate in scale, but just as nostalgic, is Gerald Finzi's *Requiem da Camera*, a four-movement setting of poems by John Masefield, Thomas Hardy, and Wilfred W. Gibson for chamber chorus, chamber orchestra, and baritone soloist. Dedicated to the memory of Finzi's composition teacher, who was killed in World War I, the piece's large theme is the futility of war. Soaring melodies combine with the texts to evoke the English landscape of times gone by. The title is meant to suggest a kind of secular requiem.

With John Harbison's *Flight into Egypt*, we return to the full forces of chorus and orchestra, accompanied by soprano and baritone soloists. The work is of such ingenuity and expressiveness that it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in music for 1987 and is considered the composer's most acclaimed choral composition. Commissioned to compose a work for Christmas, Harbison chose to pass by the familiar Christmas texts and themes to focus instead, as he put it, on "the darker side of Christmas." This he did by selecting the story that immediately follows the nativity story in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew; this is the tale of the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt to evade Herod's plan to kill the infant Jesus. A baritone soloist serves as narrator, and a soprano soloist serves as the warning voice from heaven; to the chorus are assigned the three Old Testament texts quoted in the New Testament's narrative. The piece's ingenuity consists in its being built on a single four-note motif that appears and reappears in seemingly endless permutations and disguises. Harbison refers to the work as a modern example of the musical form *ricercar*, a predecessor of the fugue, whose Italian name means "searching out something hidden." The name of the form thus describes exactly what the composer asks the audience to do—to be on the alert for the appearing and disappearing motif.

The program features Benjamin Britten's *Cantata Misericordium*, originally composed for the celebration in Geneva of the centenary of the Red Cross in 1963. The text is based on the familiar story of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel according to Saint Luke, but is a most unusual one, for instead of reproducing the New Testament text verbatim (as did Harbison in *Flight into Egypt*), Britten used a version of the story composed in Latin by Patrick Wilkinson. The ancient language lends the text solemnity and authority, but the text is not merely a traditional retelling of the tale: by introducing a passage from the Roman scholar Pliny the Elder, it insists that the principle of the Golden Rule is not only Judeo-Christian in origin but is shared by pagans—indeed, by all sensitive human beings. The piece opens with a quiet reflection by the chorus on the virtue of compassion, using music that returns in the mouth of the Samaritan when he comes to the rescue of the traveler. As the work proceeds, the chorus not only tells the story but actually takes part in it, addressing the characters of the drama as though they could hear it. The solo tenor and baritone enact the dialogue that frames the story, and they also represent the traveler and the Samaritan. Solo strings act as indicators of passing time. There is much tone-painting in the music, as is particularly noticeable in the violent passage in which the traveler is attacked by robbers.

Our concluding selection, *Psalm 148* by Gustav Holst, is a setting of a poem that is loosely based on the jubilant psalm. Holst begins with the quiet statement of a familiar hymn tune, which he then works through many variations and builds to a glorious and emphatic conclusion.

Our four soloists are soprano Diana Solomon-Glover, mezzo-soprano Mary Ann Hart, tenor Scott Murphree, and baritone Tyler Duncan. Ms. Solomon-Glover, who has appeared in opera, concert, recital, and musical theatre, most recently was the featured soloist and producer of a series of fundraising concerts for Project People Foundation, an organization working with AIDS orphans in South

a suggested benefactor price of \$125 each.

Please feel free to pay what you can and join us!

Mark your calendars and, if you were ever in the chorus, be on the look-out for the invitation in the mail. Of course, friends are welcome so if you are a supporter who has never sung with us and wishes to attend, please contact NAS Manager Amy Harrison at amyharry@aol.com, call her at 212-842-1511, or check out our website www.nasingers.org for more details.

I look forward to seeing everyone there!

CDS ON SALE!

Contact Ray Scheindlin at rscheindlin@gmail.com to order copies!

New Amsterdam Singers is offering CDs of our concerts prior to the 2007-2008 season for a mere \$7.00, **a discount of more than 50% off the full price.**

Besides permitting you to re-live the original concerts, the cds can serve as a thoughtful gift to a friend, and one that can win new friends for NAS. Our Christmas concert from 2006, "Voices Alone", featuring Vaughan Williams's *Mass in G Minor* and Randall Thompson's *The Peaceable Kingdom*, would be particularly appropriate. Or consider our 2004 concert "Christmas with NAS", featuring J. S. Bach's motet *Singet dem Herrn*. Choose

Africa. Ms. Hart is chair of the voice department at Indiana University and has appeared with the New York Philharmonic and other major orchestras. Mr. Murphree, who teaches voice at New York University, has created roles in several operatic world premieres. Mr. Duncan has won numerous awards for his singing—most recently, the 2008 New York Oratorio Society competition—and has performed widely in oratorio and opera.

Let me introduce you to a special friend of mine . . .

by

Katie DiSalvo

In the soprano section, there is a woman of "infinite variety." She has a killer memory: she can recite full texts of pieces she sang in German seven years ago, and tell about 800 jokes of varying cleanliness with perfect timing. She was a state level soccer player in high school in New Jersey. She announced that she was engaged at 19 although it greatly concerned her liberal parents. She has a big heart and is devoted to her wonderful husband Mark, her family and friends. Also, she loves animals pretty much indiscriminately - - from her vicious childhood iguanas that grew so big they were given to the zoo, to the hermit crab the author of this profile misguidedly brought to college. I'm lucky to know Veronica Alfano, PhD candidate in English at Princeton, and occasional NAS lecturer on poetry. You should get to know her too. Consider this a start.



Veronica, what three adjectives best describe you?

Idealistic, dedicated and cynical.

What's your favorite thing about NAS?

Besides the people, I like the fact that Clara cares deeply about the text we're singing and makes efforts to give us translations and have experts talk about the historical backgrounds of pieces – like Ray Scheindlin talking about the Britten –that was really refreshing.

The world's in trouble - increasing numbers of people are going to be fighting for their daily bread. Defend the humanities.

Oh, dear. Art is what keeps us human. It is necessary to do completely un-necessary things.

What poem would you most like David Rentz or another NAS composer to set?

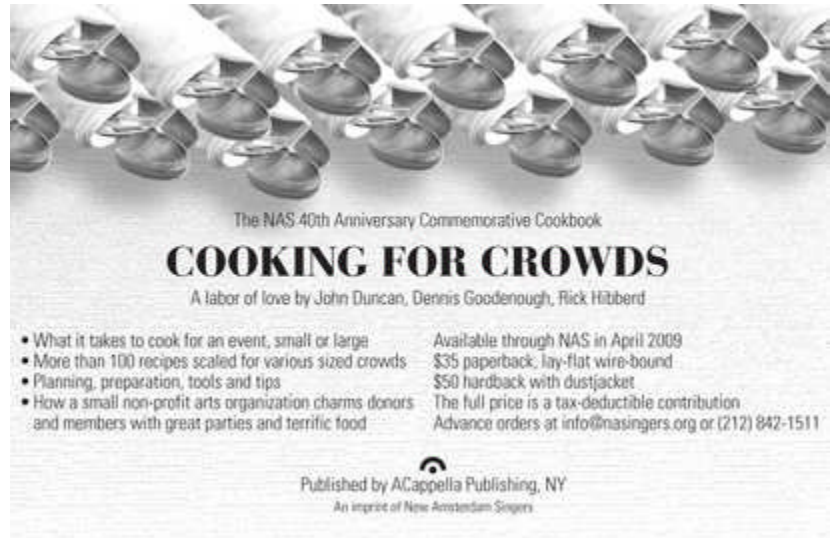
I'd have to go with something that's not completely formally strict... so maybe a Hopkins poem. Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves. In a way it's aspiring to the condition of music already, almost trying to exist as pure sound. The first line is "Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable, vaulty, voluminous, ... stupendous".

What is your favorite word in the English language?

Ooo. It changes a lot... there are so many... I'm feeling great pressure.

from among more than a dozen cds in our inventory. Order now! We'll pay the cost of shipping and handling.

Callipygian. It means having shapely buttocks. I read it in Lolita, and I fell in love with it.



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