



# Grace Notes

*Newsletter of New Amsterdam Singers*

## February 2010

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



Join us for  
**Madrigals for Hard Times**

Friday  
**March 19, 8pm**  
Sunday  
**March 21, 4pm**

The Church of the Holy Trinity  
316 East 88th Street  
(btwn 1st and 2nd Avenues)

Purchase tickets now:  
[www.nasingers.org](http://www.nasingers.org)

This program replicates the Madrigal Singers New York program of March 1938 sponsored by the WPA during the Great Depression.

Madrigals and Chansons by Renaissance and

## NAS Sings Mostly Madrigals in March

by Ray Scheindlin

Rare though it be for an NAS program to relate to current events, our March program is intended as a musical comment on the current unemployment crisis.

The program will consist of twenty-seven short pieces, most of them madrigals by renaissance composers, seasoned with a sprinkling of madrigal-like pieces from the twentieth century. Some of the earlier composers represented are William Byrd, Carlo Gesualdo, Orlando Gibbons, and Claudio Monteverdi; the moderns are Claude Debussy and Francis Poulenc. Works by Thomas Morley and Orlando Lassus are prominent.

You might well wonder that such a line-up has to do with current events.

The answer comes from the program's history. It is a partial reenactment of one that was given in New York in 1938 by the WPA-sponsored Madrigal Singers, directed by Lehman Engel. In response to the unemployment crisis that followed the Great Depression, the government created work programs that sustained millions through the dark years. In its day, the WPA was the nation's largest employer, and among its many branches was Federal Music Project. This program in turn supported, among many others, a group of eighteen singers who gave over one thousand concerts during the four years of its existence. Our program is intended to call attention to the parallel between those days and ours.

Since madrigals are ordinarily sung by small ensembles, the full chorus will be divided into two smaller choruses, with each being responsible for part of the program. In addition, there are several pieces for chamber chorus and three duets for soloists. The program aims for balance between the familiar, jolly madrigal mode and the sorrowful, self-pitying type.



twentieth century composers, including William Byrd, William Costeley, Claude Debussy, John Farmer, Carlo Gesualdo, Orlando Gibbons, Orlando Lassus, Thomas Morley, Claudio Monteverdi, Francis Pilkington, Francis Poulenc, Charles Tessier, and Thomas Weelkes.

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

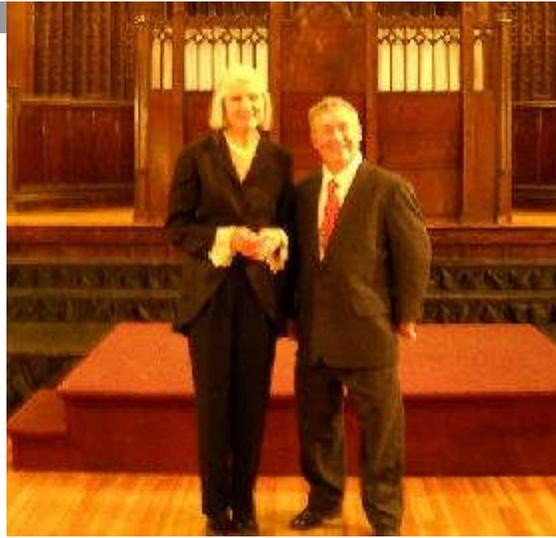
### **Extrachoricular Activities: Winetasting and Auction Raise Funds for NAS**

by Ray Scheindlin

Our fall fundraiser was a winetasting and auction conceived, organized, and directed by indefatigable alto Jenny Pham. Held in the terrace of Bob Pietrzak's building overlooking Columbus Circle, the event attracted fifty people between attendees and volunteers and raised nearly \$3500 for the chorus.

The evening began with the tasting of six wines, generously donated by Borghese Winery and Wölfner Vineyard; Waters Crest Winery donated a six-person wine-tasting to be auctioned. To elicit these contributions, Jenny had sent letters to no fewer than forty-two wineries.

After a dazzling mock swordfight by Bass



### **NAS performs Bach, Brahms with Broadway Bach Ensemble**

by Ray Scheindlin

After rehearsing for decades at Broadway Presbyterian, NAS has now performed there, in collaboration with the Broadway Bach Ensemble, a fine amateur orchestra that also rehearses at Broadway Prez. In a program presented on February 7 and 9, NAS director Clara Longstreth and BBE director Michael Tietz divided conducting duties, with Mr. Tietz conducting the chorus and orchestra in a rather solemn Bach motet with brass accompaniment, followed by the orchestra alone in Beethoven's *Second Symphony*. After an intermission, Ms. Longstreth conducted orchestra and chorus in Brahms' *Schicksalslied*, concluding the program with a jubilant chorus from Bach's Cantata 197.

In choosing the program, the two conductors sought material that would be of interest to two quite different groups of performers. Brahms' *Schicksalslied*, as a choral piece in which the orchestra carries a major part of the work on its own, proved a perfect centerpiece. At the beginning, the orchestra introduces much of the sublime musical material depicting the supernal realm and creates an elaborate texture into which the chorus gradually weaves itself; at the end of this first section, it is the orchestra that shatters this beatific vision and makes way for the chorus's contrasting depiction of mankind, battered and suffering; and towards the end, after the chorus falls silent, the orchestra undertakes alone to restore the beatific vision of the opening.

NAS does not sing regularly with orchestras. When we do, it is always exciting to watch Clara, whose choral conducting we know so well, working on this larger scale and exercising an even greater repertoire of skills than usual in this more complex arena. We are also conscious of the greater demands on our own concentration due to the greater physical distance between her and ourselves.

It is even rarer for us to perform under the baton of another conductor, and it was a delight to get to know Michael Tietz. Though officially trained as a lawyer, Mr. Tietz is just about a universal musician, playing many instruments, some of them exotic ones like

Marcos Dinnerstein and his choreography colleague Ricki Ravitts, the auction began. Jenny presided as auctioneer over the knocking down of thirteen items as varied as jewelry made by chorus members, photographic works, ten sessions with a gym trainer, private instruction in Marcos and Ricki's swordfight routine, lectures on the history and religion of Islam, and a weekend in the Longstreths' mountaintop house in Garrison, NY.

Asked to comment on the event, Jenny said, "I am hugely grateful for all the help and support I received from NAS members and their friends." As are we for all Jenny's work on the fundraiser.

A big thank you to our presenting sponsors:

**NYHRC 54th St.  
Japanese East  
Restaurants  
Le Monde  
Borghese Winery  
Wolffer Estates  
Winery  
Waters Crest  
Winery**

## **NAS Products**

NAS now has a whole line of products, including T-shirts and sweatshirts with the new NAS logo; CDs; and our very own

the vertical viola, the lute, and the bagpipes; he has even built and plays his own harpsicord. He even sings, having long been active with the Village Light Opera. But his first instrument is the cello, and during the second half of the program he sat in with the orchestra as an ordinary cellist. (He was not the only performer to change roles; our own soprano Jenny Pham and board member Harriet Levine both played violin during the first half.)

Asked to comment on the joint concert, Mr. Tietz said, "I have really enjoyed my collaboration with the NAS and had fun making music both as a conductor and as a player."

## **Singer Profile: Kim Allan**

by Jane Barry

*Jane: Kim, you returned to NAS this season. Tell me when you first joined the chorus and what were your first impressions?*

I joined in 1987 and some may think this is when the dinosaurs roamed but it's not at all unusual for many have surpassed me.

First impressions -- hmmm, once the break started everyone started to chat as if they hadn't seen each other in years - they all seemed to like each other very much. (Oddly, no one really spoke much to me for the first year or two, however, the group's sound and our music was so beautiful that I was hooked.) As I slowly became acquainted with many of the members, it was always a surprise to discover their diverse backgrounds and wide range of talents, (i.e. anesthesiologists, ballet manager, captains of industry, stay at home mom/dad, teacher, puppeteer, bartender).

*Jane: Are there performances that have stuck in your mind and what made you return?*

Yes, there were several and it's hard to say what has stuck since so many were wonderful. We once sang a collection of songs based on poems senior citizens had written in old age homes around the world. One ending passage was....."I owe earth, it doesn't owe me a thing...." It was so beautiful that I had a tough time keeping my eyes from welling up during the performance. We also performed pieces by a local NYC composer, Matthew Harris, called Shakespeare Sonatas. I later met Matthew at a children's event and everyone was a bit startled at how excited I was to meet him - they would have thought he was a rock star - in my mind, he was. And of course,



cookbook.

**Clothing:** We have t-shirts, sweatshirts, and hooded sweatshirts in various colors and sizes, all bearing our new log. T-shirts and cost \$15; sweatshirts cost \$20; hooded sweatshirts cost \$25. They can be ordered at rehearsals or by sending Nate a message at mickelsonjn@yahoo.com.

**Cookbook:** The cost NAS's own cookbook, *Cooking for Crowds*, is \$59 for the hardcover, \$39 for softcover (+ plus \$7.25 for shipping and handling). The cookbook is available through our website (nasingers.org). Dennis Goodenough, one of the cookbook's three editors, described it in our last newsletter as follows: "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 to serve up to 200 people . . . Not that anyone would want to do that on a regular basis!"

there are the scores of talented composers past and present that Clara reveals in her music selection. This is probably what made me come back to the chorus. I love how hard it is to start learning these pieces, many unknown, and then, one day, it all comes together so beautifully.

*Jane: Do you enjoy the social aspect of NAS and which activities in particular?*

Absolutely. Obviously I've enjoyed meeting so many interesting and nice people. One of my great friends, Robin James, sang at my wedding. Another great person, Barbara Zucker-Pinchoff--the anesthesiologist I mentioned before, turned cabaret singer, jewelry designer, etc.--connected me to the head anesthesiologist at the hospital where I was about to deliver my first 10+ lb. baby. (That was my best networking connection ever). Tim DeWerf is known to us all as the book editor, and then one day there he is playing the piano, and we're all stunned at his talent. However, every single person in the chorus has something special and with one common denominator: they all like to sing.

*Jane: What do you do in your other non-chorus life?*

Well, besides work and keeping an eye of my lively teenagers-I like to cook, entertain and travel, especially to some of the places in Europe where I lived as a youth. Over the past few years, I became very involved supporting my dad who ran for office in his local community and learned a great deal about our country and how politics are not for the nice guys. I really enjoy sports and the outdoors-skiing is my favorite-and volunteering for non-for-profit organizations. And then there's that little french place around the corner from rehearsal with the beer specials....

*Jane: Do you have goals and ideas for NAS' growth?*

Interest in our chorus has always been via word of mouth, but with so many internet-based social networking avenues we should leverage other channels to build awareness and attract new singers. One of the gems of this chorus is the selection of music. Clara has this keen ability to unearth extraordinarily talented and diverse composers and direct our chorus to perform and premier their works! This is something that separates us from other groups - and the sound is so clean.



## **Featured Volunteer: Scott Gillam**

by Jane Barry

The New Amsterdam Singers Organization is a well-oiled machine. I've noted with interest, the way everything just appears and certain people (volunteers)

**CDs:** Our two-disk fortieth anniversary CD, containing forty-six pieces, is a special bargain at \$20. All CDs are available through the NAS website ([nasingers.org](http://nasingers.org)). We also have in stock:

*American Journey* (1993), our twenty-fifth anniversary CD, issued in 1993, is sold for \$15.

*Island of Hope* (2002), featuring works by Ronald Perera, Randall Thompson, Paul Alan Levi, Ricky Ian Gordon, and Leonard Bernstein, is yours for \$15.

**Concert CDs:** We have CDs left over from most of our concerts going back to 1990. We are making them available at the clearance sale rate of just \$10 (including shipping and postage). Fill in the gaps in your collection for pennies per song! Send one to a friend out of town at our expense!

## Donate to NAS

Like other amateur organizations, NAS operates on a tight budget, so we appreciate your help very much.

Please visit us on the web and show your support by making a tax-deductible donation: <http://nasingers.org/donate.html>



know exactly what their task entails. We thought we'd ask Scott Gillam how this all works and why he does it.

*Jane: Scott, I've noticed, since I've been in NAS, that there magically appears music, separated into neat piles with numbers listed for each singer. How does this all happen? And what made you become a volunteer?*

The work of the NAS music librarian is really pretty straightforward. Clara orders the music that's needed for the next concert well in advance because she knows that there can be delays in fulfilling orders. So I usually have plenty of time to hole-punch, stamp, and number the music. I'm lucky to live near Broadway Presbyterian, so it's easy for me to do most of the necessary work in our apartment and then bring the music to rehearsal on a luggage carrier. It's also really convenient to have storage capacity at a church like Broadway Presbyterian that understands our needs. I'm very grateful, as well, for the help of Cindy Brome and Ann McKinney, respectively, in schlepping and storing music, and Jason Lowenhar for monitoring our orders and music catalogue on the web.

I volunteered to be librarian because somebody needed to do the job, and I had a feeling I would like it. But in the back of my mind I also had the idea that with some help I could also rent out NAS music and at least partly defray our expenses for new music and storage space. So I planned a series of work parties in which volunteers inventoried our holdings (well over 1,000 individual titles, with an average of over 50 copies per title) and transferred music from dusty envelopes into clearly labeled white storage boxes. From this inventory I created a rental catalogue that we first mailed to several hundred potential renters, and later put up on the NAS web site for much wider and cheaper distribution. In 2007, a huge donation of music by another chorus swelled our inventory by almost 30 percent and now accounts for about half our rentals.

Getting the music back after a concert or after renting it can be tricky, since singers are human and lose or misplace scores, spill coffee on them, etc. And yes, the Post Office occasionally damages a box. But on the whole these have not been problems. The choral community appreciates our rental service, and folks are invariably willing to pay whatever penalties are due for loss or damage. Over 60 percent of our business this season has been from repeat customers.

*Jane: How long have you been in NAS and how has your feeling for the chorus changed over the years?*

I'm proud to be a near-charter member of NAS, having joined the group in 1969. Since I had recently served in the Peace Corps and then traveled in Israel and Europe, I hadn't sung in a chorus in 2 ½ years when I joined NAS, and I was really starved for classical music. It was a joy to sing 4-part music again, though some of our venues left something to be desired. Try singing in the rain at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade or outside in some plaza with no

You can also send a check made out to NAS. Our address is NAS, Box 373, New York, NY 10025.

amplification. But as the years went by, our sound got better and better, and our performance spaces improved accordingly. I'm very grateful to Clara for choosing such outstanding repertoire and for putting in all the hard work to bring NAS to where it is today.

*Jane: Has your voice changed, gotten deeper and have you changed from one voice category to another?*

Yeah, starting when I was eleven years old!

I started out in serious classic music as a teenage tenor--the first large scale work I sang at a summer camp was Brahms's *Schicksalslied*. I continued as a tenor until about 1983, when a voice teacher suggested I might be a more natural baritone. But I still enjoy singing tenor occasionally in NAS, especially on the works I first learned in that part. I also sing second tenor most of the time in 4-0-Four, a male quartet I've been a member of for years, and that has really helped me maintain my tenor range.

*Jane: Is there anything you would change about the chorus and what makes you so dedicated?*

*How about serving hot toddies during break at these cold winter night rehearsals?*

But seriously, choral singing has always been a natural high for me—a way of expressing the whole range of emotions, perhaps especially those which, like Wordsworth's windblown flower, are too deep for tears. NAS has always been a great way of keeping in touch with all those emotions, and I expect it always will be.

*Look for the Featured Volunteer column in future issues.*

© 2009 New Amsterdam Singers



**PO Box 373  
Cathedral Station  
New York, NY 10025  
[www.nasingers.org](http://www.nasingers.org)**

This e-mail was sent from New Amsterdam Singers  
Immediate removal with **PatronMail**<sup>®</sup>  
[SecureUnsubscribe](#).



To forward this e-mail to a friend or colleague, [use this link](#).

To change your e-mail address or update preferences, [use this link](#).