



Grace Notes

May 2009

Newsletter of the New
Amsterdam Singers

Lauren Scott, Editor

Nate Mickelson, Layout

Join us for our May Concert!

Song and Dance
Circles, Sets, and Cycles

Wednesday, May 27
8 p.m.

The Riverside Theater at 120th
Street
91 Claremont Avenue

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

Choral masters of the twentieth
century set poetry of Charles
d'Orleans, Shakespeare, and
Langston Hughes, as well as great
folk melodies of Hungary,
Argentina, and the USA.

*Original choreography by Samuel
Pott and Nimbus Dance Works will
enhance the Debussy and Ravel*

Dancing to Debussy and Ravel in "Six Chansons"

by Sam Pott, Artistic Director,
Nimbus Dance Works

I like to think that when a new
creative project comes along, it
is my job to uncover what new
idea or experience it offers to
me. I had never created a story
ballet before. So, when Clara
Longstreth and I began talking
about working together and
setting a dance to some of the
music for the New Amsterdam
Singers 40th Anniversary, I was
hoping that the music she
presented me with would neatly
fall into a storyline that I could
base the new dance around. I



Photo by Otero/Seclen Photography.

had just begun teaching regular
ballet classes at Rutgers University
and was very immersed in the
language of classical ballet, al-
though my approach to movement
has always been more contemporary
and eclectic. Always more prone
to choreograph abstract movement
to music, I wanted to try my hand
at using a classical movement
vocabulary to tell a story.

I began listening closely to a
series of songs by Claude Debussy
and Maurice Ravel that Clara had
given me. The chorus was singing
in old French and, though there
wasn't an obvious common thread
to the narrative content of the
pieces, the songs nonetheless
carried an evocative quality that
seemed well-suited to dance.
Stubbornly, I was determined to
glean a storyline out of these six
pieces – I thought at one point
that the dancers would enter
onstage carrying large placards
with stenciled words that would
act as subtitles clueing the audi-
ence to the story that we were
attempting to tell. I also consid-
ered inventing my own story –
the lyrics were in old French after
all; who would know if there was
absolutely no connection between
the drama onstage and the con-
tent of the songs!

Trois Chansons.

3 Ways to Purchase Tickets:

In Person:

91 Claremont Ave, main floor

Box Office Hours

Thursday-Saturday:

4:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Sunday:

12:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Online:

Please go to the event you're interested in and click on the "Buy Tickets" button.

<http://www.theriversidechurchny.org/theatre/boxoffice.php>

By Phone:

212.870.6784

May 27th Concert Features "Dance" and "Folk" Music

by Clara Longstreth

The program for the final concert of the NAS season has several interlocking themes: four works are cycles (sets of three movements), several have references to dance or folk music, all are by well-known 20th Century composers, and most are works NAS performed 10 - 25 years ago.

After the 2007-2008 season in which we sang many world or NYC premieres, it seemed appropriate to return to some old favorites, gems of the choral repertoire—thus the choice of the Debussy and Ravel chansons, the Kodaly, Vaughn Williams, and Ricky Ian Gordon sets.

NAS had performed with the Limon Dance Company in 1997, and wanted to commission a dance as part of our 40th Anniversary Celebration. Sam Pott chose to work with the Debussy and Ravel

Each song, though, does contain glimmers of a story. There is Nicolette, a 'little-red-riding-hoodesque' girl who must choose between different suitors. There is a fiery duel of the seasons: winter versus spring. There is a young woman who receives a message from three birds that her husband has been killed at war. Yet, I couldn't conceive of a way that the selections could be strung together into a single narrative. If the music hadn't been so beautiful, I might have stopped trying for a narrative and thrown together something cute and crowd-pleasing.

In working with the dancers in the rehearsal studio what has emerged has been a kind of assemblage of stories. What knits them together is not a clearly defined narrative thread, but a composition where story vies with abstraction; individuals, couples and groups contend with one another; and modern contrasts with classical. Partway through the creative process it began to dawn on me how appropriate these contrasts are considering the historical period that the music comes from. Debussy and Ravel, in addition to pioneering entirely new approaches to music composition, were also creating music during a historical period of unprecedented transition. At the turn of the century the world was steaming into the modern industrial age but was still very connected to its agrarian and village-based past. World War I not only brought staggering destruction and death tolls but also displaced millions of people and their communities. Within Debussy's and Ravel's compositions I think one can hear echoes of this monumental transition – the old world and the new world are both present.

In "Six Chansons" (the title of the dance I created to accompany Debussy's and Ravel's choral works), the story ballet that I wanted to create does emerge, but perhaps in a manner that is actually more suited to these composers' approach to music. I attempted to depict the heart-wrenching imagistic stories from these choral pieces and at the same time capture the undertones of conflict between the old and the new and the innocent versus the jaded. Oh yeah... And I did throw in some crowd-pleasing moments for good measure!

40th Anniversary Party a Great Success

More than 130 singers, fans and friends gathered to celebrate 40 years of NAS memories at the Prince George Ballroom on April 18th. With a delicious signature cocktail and a terrific DVD presentation of pictures and stories from each of the group's four decades, it was a magical night. Congratulations to everyone involved, and here's to the next 40 years!



sets (see his article on his process). Dance rhythms are prominent in the Piazzolla arrangement, in Country Dances, and in the jazzy piano part of the Ricky Ian Gordon trio.

Folk music was as much a source for our composers as dance. Kodaly's *Matra Pictures* is based on Hungarian folklore; Swingle's *Country Dances* cleverly mixes ten American folk tunes, while Wilberg's *I'm Goin' Away* arranges a single beloved tune from North Carolina. Piazzolla's *Verano Porteño* (Summer in Buenos Aires) is an original composition, not an arrangement, but the rhythms of the tango certainly came from the "folk", from the slums of Argentina.

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



Scott Gillam, Allan Miller, and Barbara Zucker-Pinchoff. Allan is the founder of the chorus. Photo by Hannah Kerwin.



James Gregory and Vickie Miller. Vickie, who has been with the chorus since it began, retired this year after the March concert. Photo by Hannah Kerwin.



Baking a Career in the Arts

by Bendix Anderson

Last Saturday, Marcos Dinnerstein baked a dozen bagels—poppy seed, sesame, and onion. "I've been a baker for years," says Dinnerstein. "I always thought bagels would be a major difficult proposition."

But like many challenges he's taken on, bagels proved less difficult than he feared. The whole process took just two-and-a-half hours.

Baking is just the latest creative art mastered by Dinnerstein (53), who worked as a professional ballet dancer for nearly 20 years, has stage-managed both on and off-Broadway, and has sung with the New Amsterdam Singers since 2002. In his spare time, he also enjoys kayaking and tango dancing with his wife.

Dinnerstein's career in ballet began when he was just 18 with a role as one of eight dancers in the chorus of City Opera's Spanish-language production of *The Merry Widow*.

The role required Marcos to perform a double tour en l'air on the forward edge of the stage.

"I was convinced I would shoot off like the Challenger shuttle and fall into the orchestra pit," he remembers.

He continued dancing until he was 39, including a five-year stint at the Metropolitan Opera.

He spent the next ten years as stage manager for a variety of shows both on and off-Broadway, including *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, which won three 1998 Tony Awards and a pair of 1998 Drama Desk Awards.

Dinnerstein also served as fight captain for *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.

Today, Dinnerstein creates program code for an Internet and technology company called Linkstorm. The company improves the performance of Internet ads, building the information pathways potential customers steer through as they travel through an ad.

For his performance fix, Dinnerstein has the New Amsterdam Singers (NAS). He has sung with NAS for the last six years.

This May, Dinnerstein will stage manage our show with Nimbus Dance Works at Riverside Theatre, located in the historic Riverside Church.



The NAS 40th Anniversary Commemorative Cookbook
COOKING FOR CROWDS
A labor of love by John Durcan, Dennis Goodenough, Rick Hibberd

- What it takes to cook for an event, small or large
- More than 100 recipes scaled for various sized crowds
- Planning, preparation, tools and tips
- How a small non-profit arts organization charms donors and members with great parties and terrific food

Available through NAS in April 2009
\$35 paperback, lay-flat wire-bound
\$50 hardback with dustjacket
The full price is a tax-deductible contribution
Advance orders at info@nasingers.org or (212) 842-1511

Published by ACappella Publishing, NY
An imprint of New Amsterdam Singers

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