



Grace Notes

**Newsletter of the New
Amsterdam Singers**

November 2008

Lauren Scott, Editor

Nate Mickelson, Layout



**Join us at our
December Concert!**

**Carols, Motets, and
Psalms**

Music for Chorus and
Harp

**Friday, December 12,
2008 at 8 p.m.
Sunday, December
14, 2008 at 4 p.m.**

Purchase tickets now:

www.nasingers.org

Immanuel Lutheran Church
122 East 88th Street (at
Lexington Avenue)

Program includes:

**Martin's *Mass* and Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*
to Star at December concerts**

by Clara Longstreth

When we started making plans for a season that includes celebrating New Amsterdam Singers' 40th Anniversary, we knew that one element would be a concert featuring our very most treasured works from our past. Thus for December 12 and 14 we have programmed Frank Martin's double chorus *Mass*, a work we have sung twice before which is unusually suited to the chorus and universally admired. The appeal of this 26 minute a cappella work lies in the melodic interest of the individual lines, the harmony, Romantic, modal, and adventurous by turns, and its fluid rhythms with changing meters.

Benjamin Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*, for treble voices and harp, is the other piece we are reviving from our past repertoire. Indeed, this set of ten carols on medieval and Renaissance texts is such an audience favorite that we return to it every five or six years. We are delighted that the distinguished harpist, Susan Jolles, will play with us, as she did in 2002.

But since really new music is a specialty of NAS, we will also be singing things that are brand new. Notable among these works is *Carmina mei cordis* by Abbie Betinis. This accomplished young Colorado composer has already

Frank Martin's stirring *Mass*

Benjamin Britten's beloved
Ceremony of Carols

PLUS lively new works by
Juan de Araujo, Richard
Rodney Bennett, Abbie
Betinis, Daniel Pinkham,
Joseph Gabriel
Rheinberger, and Veljo
Tormis.

with Susan Jolles, Harp

For further information, call
Amy Harrison at
212-842-1511

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.**

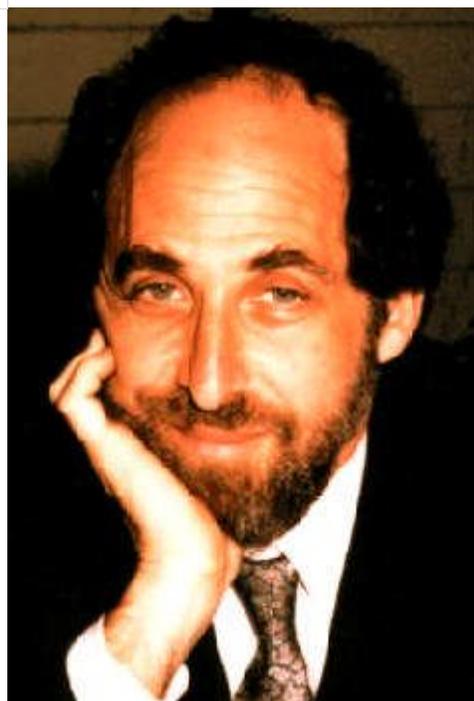
Besides permitting you to
re-live the original concerts,
the cds can serve as a
thoughtful gift to a friend,
and one that can win new
friends for NAS. Our
Christmas concert from
2006, "Voices Alone",
featuring Vaughan
Williams's *Mass in G Minor*
and Randall Thompson's
The Peaceable Kingdom,
would be particularly
appropriate as a Christmas
stocking stuffer. 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

received almost 40 commissions. The influences she cites on her harmony are the music of Poulenc and Messiaen. Another recent new work is Richard Rodney Bennett's *I Saw Three Ships*, written in 2006, which receives its USA premiere with our December performances. I chose this because we had so enjoyed Bennett's *Nonsense* last May, and because I found the combination of unison writing and bitonal bell-like effects captivating in this work.

While the women rehearse *Ceremony of Carols*, the men have been working on a fascinating piece by the Estonian composer, Veljo Tormis. This piece was first commissioned by the King's Singers, then re-worked for male chorus and soloists. *The Bishop and the Pagan* draws its tale from church documents and folklore, and tells of the death of a Christian missionary, Bishop Henry, at the hands of a Finnish peasant in 1158. The text is in Latin and Finnish, and incorporates both Gregorian chant and folk song.

Another interesting mix of cultures is found in *Los negritos a la Navidad*, a late Baroque villancico by a Spanish composer, Araujo, who lived in Peru. The language is a Black dialect of Spanish, and its charm lies in its lively rhythm. There is much syncopation and alternation of 6/8 with 3/4 meter (unusual in our culture, common in Latin American music).

One could think of Martin's *Mass* as the main course of these concerts, but the condiments, from Peru to Estonia, Colorado to England, will provide their own delights. Do come!



A Conversation with Ray Scheindlin

by Lauren Scott

Bass Ray Scheindlin has been singing since he was eight years old (and he's not about to stop!), when he was chosen by the "old men" in his synagogue in Philadelphia to sing soprano in the old-fashioned all-male choir. Having spent the summer learning the music and solos, he then sang the High Holy Days services for two years. "It had a tremendous impact on me," Ray says. He didn't really return to choral singing for a long time, though in the interim he took piano lessons on and off and played clarinet in the high school band.

Ray, who also serves on the Board, has sung with NAS for the last five years. When he decided that he'd like to join a chorus, he consulted his son, a violist who plays with the Met orchestra, who suggested he ask his friend Kathy Schuman and the rest is history. Ray loves the chorus and has great admiration for Clara. He likes the level of work that we do: "It is music that I have to reach for."

After those early piano lessons, he played on his own for a long time, then had a "serious bout" of lessons and piano camp when he was in his forties. Now he is

cost of shipping and handling.

NAS 40th Anniversary Commemorative Cookbook

by James Crowell

As you might have heard, John Duncan, Dennis Goodenough and Rick Hibberd are hard at work to create a special NAS 40th anniversary commemorative cookbook featuring our favorite recipes from 25+ years of fundraising benefits. Called "Cooking for Crowds," it will include photos and anecdotes from our shared NAS experiences in a professional case-bound edition. We're hoping the book will bring back lots of wonderful memories from our unique experiences together. Besides being a great memento for us all, we plan to sell the book commercially, possibly through Amazon. All proceeds will benefit NAS. Right now, we are hoping for an April 2009 first edition printing, so be on the lookout this Spring for updates and the unveiling of this unique and collectible book!

again seriously taking piano lessons and playing a lot. He and fellow NAS singer, Mike Landy, who plays the flute, have been meeting on Tuesdays before chorus to play flute-and-piano music. He has also been playing with a trio and is very interested in finding partners with whom to make music. He has long been accompanying his wife, Janice, a professional opera singer as she prepares her roles. Ray says that he can play a lot of Janice's music and that it "makes me feel really good that I can do anything at all with a professional musician."

Ray has been Professor of Hebrew Literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary since 1974. He feels himself fortunate to be teaching in a Jewish Studies program where the students know Hebrew. His research specialty is the middle ages and he is particularly interested in how the Jews and Arabs interacted from the Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries. He has also made a specialty of translating medieval Hebrew poetry into English verse and has published a number of books, including a translation of the Book of Job. He knows Hebrew really well and got his Ph.D. in Arabic language and literature. When asked whether his specialty spilled over into the present day, he said that he is well informed about Islam and very interested in current events in the Middle East. And his daughter is a public opinion analyst and pollster in Tel Aviv. He wanted to volunteer his Arabist skills after September 11th and became "really frustrated" that he couldn't find anywhere to use his knowledge, particularly as he had been granted federal money in the past to study Arabic. He finally found a niche as a volunteer in the New York Attorney General's Office and was able to aid in reading Arabic and Hebrew documents in the investigation of a terrorist.

Born and raised in Philadelphia, Ray says "I came to New York City as soon as I could afford a train ticket." Except for a brief stint in Canada, he has lived here ever since. He met his wife, Janice Meyerson, when "Hebrew and music brought them together" 25 years ago. The New York Philharmonic had hired Janice to sing in Leonard Bernstein's "Jeremiah" Symphony. Zubin Mehta told her that she needed to work on her Hebrew pronunciation. Ray was recommended and they've been together ever since!

Ray says, "My hobbies are predictably nerdy." He studies Greek with a buddy once a week. Foreign languages are very important to him; besides Hebrew and Arabic, he reads German, French, and Spanish very well and loves singing in other languages. He is seriously interested in classical English and American literature. He likes walking and being outdoors and he is "an adoptive cat father because Janice is a cat freak".

If you don't know Ray already, get to know him! He's fascinating!

NAS 40th Anniversary 2-CD Set Coming November 20

by Scott Gillam

A 2-CD compilation of best-loved New Amsterdam Singers' live performances, entitled "40th Anniversary Collection: 1968–2008," will be available for purchase beginning November 18—just in time for the holiday season. The double album, which includes almost 2½ hours of music, will sell for just \$20.

The collection includes 24 selections, dating from our Merkin Concert Hall debut in May 1983, when NAS first began to have its concerts professionally recorded. As NAS oldtimers may recall, N.Y. Times music critic Bernard Holland's review of that concert ("Every so often musicians who perform as amateurs offer us gifts that professionals cannot") helped bring NAS to wider attention on the New York music scene.

Among the most recent performances included on the discs are excerpts from Ronald Perera's *Why I Wake Early* from the March 2008 concert at Church of the Holy Trinity. In his review of that performance, music critic Steve Smith of the Times described the Perera work as "a substantial addition to the choral canon." Other composers represented include J.S. Bach, Schein, Schütz, Haydn, Schubert, Dvorák, Brahms, Byrd, Copland, Scott Joplin, Poulenc, Frank Martin, Benjamin Britten, Paul Alan Levi, Matthew Harris, and Irving Fine.

After much listening to archival recordings, selections for the 2-CD set were made by Scott Gillam and a committee that included Clara Longstreth, Paula Franklin, and Betty Kulleseid. The disc includes performances from 21 different concerts in seven different venues. Full chorus, chamber chorus, men's chorus, and women's chorus are all represented. The CD masters were assembled from analog and digital sources by longtime NAS recording engineer Dongsok Shin. The recordings will be available in a slim jewel case package handsomely designed by John Duncan. Included is a 28-page booklet with the original program notes, texts, and translations, as edited by Scott with assistance from Clara, Paula, Cindy Brome, and Phillip Holmgren.

This whole project was a labor of love that brought back many happy memories. I hope every listener will respond as enthusiastically as I did on hearing these marvelous recordings.

Order your copy at: www.nasingers.org/record.html



From left: Paul Greenwood, Kate Leahy, Robin Beckhard, André Guthman and Barbara Zucker-Pinchoff

"Old Friends" and New Gather for NAS Benefit

by Amy Harrison

The old world ambiance of the House of the Redeemer was a perfect setting for NAS's benefit cabaret on November 2nd featuring versatile NAS cabaret singers André Guthman, Barbara Zucker-Pinchoff, Robin Beckhard and Kate Leahy.

After a sumptuous cocktail hour catered by Jenny Pham and her team (John Duncan, James and Dana Crowell and Patti Stockinger) guests moved to the library for the show. A delightful opening song parody written by long-time NAS groupie Gail Duncan to the tune of *We Open in Venice* from *Kiss Me Kate* provided the mood for the night. For the next hour and a half the audience was treated to a variety of songs from this talented quartet.

One of the newer NAS singer volunteers Nate Mickelson reported, "The mood was electric. I saw many smiles and heard many kind words for the chef, the barkeep, the servers, and the performers. The more fans we can reach, the more people we can make happy, just like we did last night!"

NEW AMSTERDAM SINGERS

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