

NEW AMSTERDAM SINGERS

Church of the Holy Trinity
Friday, March 11, 2011 at 8 PM
Sunday, March 13, 2011 at 4 PM

Clara Longstreth, Music Director
Geoffrey McDonald, Assistant Conductor
Jonathan Bautista, Chamber Chorus Assistant Conductor
Pen Ying Fang, Accompanist

Songs for the Changing Seasons

Many-Colored Brooms Johannes Somary (1935-2011)

Cycle on poems by Emily Dickinson

She sweeps with many-colored brooms

Wild Nights

Over the Fence

Some Keep the Sabbath

Jane Barry, soprano

Two Butterflies went out at Noon

Tara Mack, soprano; Ellen Stark, alto (3/11)

Katherine Leahy, soprano; Leah Kaplan, alto (3-13)

Bee! I'm expecting you!

Blazing in Gold

For Women's Voices

Jayn Rosenfeld, flute, piccolo; Ah Ling Neu, viola; Pen Ying Fang, piano

Dateless Calendar

Paul Alan Levi (b. 1941)

On poems by Sally Fisher

January

February

March

April

May

June

July

August Robin Beckhard, soprano; Jennifer Trahan, alto

September

October

November

December

World Premiere

Commissioned by New Amsterdam Singers
in honor of Paul Alan Levi's 70th Birthday

Jayn Rosenfeld, flute, piccolo; Christopher Cullen, clarinet, bass clarinet
William Trigg, vibraphone, xylophone; Emilie Gendron, violin
Adam Graboīs, cello; Pen Ying Fang, piano

Intermission

Mid-Winter Songs

Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)

On poems by Robert Graves

Lament for Pasiphaë

Like Snow

She tells her Love While Half Asleep

Mid-Winter Waking

Intercession in late October

Chamber Chorus

Give me the Splendid Silent Sun

Thomas Beveridge (b. 1938)

Poem by Walt Whitman

Robert Mobsby, baritone; Pen Ying Fang, piano

For Men's Voices

O Joy!

Kitty Brazelton (b. 1951)

New York Premiere

Program Notes

When a composer chooses to write a liturgical work, such as a Mass or a Magnificat, the text itself is a given. He may choose the language, but not the order of the lines. How different is the task confronting the composer of a choral cycle. He surely reads and re-reads many – perhaps all – of the poems by a chosen author. Perhaps the starting point is one poem, and then he looks for companions that can fit into an overarching theme. He looks for contrasting verses that will lead to a balance of fast and slow movements in his cycle. In some ways this choosing and ordering process is as demanding as the composing that follows the immersion in words.

Many composers have been drawn to Emily Dickinson's poetry. There is a great deal to choose from, and the language is full of beautiful images. Johannes Somary's cycle of seven Dickinson songs starts and ends with poems about the sun; in between come others on the natural world (butterflies, strawberries, birds, frogs). There is a love song, a confession that the poet prefers home and garden to church, and a humorous, cheery message from a fly to a bee.

Somary was a conductor, teacher, organist, and composer. He founded the professional group, Amor Artis, in 1961. He guest conducted several orchestras in England and the United States. He headed the music department at Horace Mann School, held church positions at several NYC churches, and conducted the Fairfield County Chorale starting in 1975. He conducted over fifty recordings, many of which have been re-released as compact discs. He won four Stereo Review Record of the Year awards. As a composer he wrote orchestral, chamber, and choral works.

Many Colored Brooms was written in 1996 for Somary's wife, Anne, and her Horace Mann Girls' Ensemble. Somary achieved variety in the accompanying forces for each movement. The first is a cappella, the second with flute and viola, the third piccolo, the fourth flute, viola and piano, etc. In the last movement the three instruments return to music the chorus sang in the first movement.

Paul Alan Levi's music is well known to New Amsterdam Singers and our audiences. In 1994 the chorus commissioned and performed *Journeys and Secrets*, and in 2002 commissioned, performed, and recorded *Acts of Love*. We have also performed *Holy Willie's Prayer*, *Unpoem*, and the *Mark Twain Suite*. Levi has been on the faculties of the Manhattan School of Music, Queens College, New York University, and Rutgers. He has been commissioned by the New York Choral Society, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the New York Chamber Symphony, Chamber Music Northwest, and Music Today series. He has received Guggenheim and NEA fellowships, and has won grants from Meet the Composer and the American Music Center. Recently he has performed piano duets with his wife, Cathy [Waldman](#), as the Four Hand Band.

Every year, my friend, the poet Sally Fisher, mails to her friends a Dateless Calendar, 12 cards, c. 3"by 4", each with the name of a month followed by a short, haiku-length poem that may or may not be obviously associated with its month. The poems are clear, quirky, and unpredictable, often humorous. Sally's poetry seems to push my music into areas unanticipated by either poet or composer, and creates opportunities for style collisions, which I always enjoy.

I began with six years of Dateless Calendars, 72 poems, picking twelve that I thought would clang against each other nicely. It's hard to explain what that means, but when I get all the right texts for a new piece in the right order, something inside of me says "Aaah!" Here and there I spliced two poems together for a slightly more substantial text, or used poems from other collections. The piece deals with some weighty questions, such as how do you pronounce "haiku," or how do 60 singers and six instrumentalists inhabit the soul of a dog?

Neither the poetry nor the music has an obviously unifying theme or motif, but to me, unity lies in the voice of the poet and the ear of the composer. Nevertheless, the piece has a structure that evolved subconsciously as I composed it. The first six months are performed continuously; the last six in separate movements. Something unexpected occurs every three months. And the second half of the piece contains more thoughtful, personal, or serious moments than the first.

I think of Dateless Calendar not as 12 separate vignettes, but as one single composition -- a narrative, a journey, perhaps a meal in 12 surprising courses. -- Paul Alan Levi

Morten Lauridsen has achieved a remarkable position in the choral world; it can be summed up by the fact that he has now overtaken Randall Thompson as America's most frequently performed choral composer. Several of his individual works are the all-time best selling choral octaves published by Theodore Presser. His music is recorded on more than 100 compact discs, and sung all over the world.

Born in Washington and raised in Portland, Oregon in a family that had immigrated from Denmark, Lauridsen lives in California and, in summers, on a remote island off the coast of Washington State. He has been professor of composition at the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music for more than 30 years. There, he begins each of his lectures by reading a poem. From 1994 to 2001 he was composer-in-residence with the Los Angeles Master Chorale. He was named American Choral Master by the National Endowment for the Arts in 2006, and in 2007 was given the National Medal of the Arts in a White House ceremony.

Lauridsen has written seven vocal cycles, most very challenging for singers. The first version of *Mid-Winter Songs* was commissioned by USC and written in 1981 for chorus and piano. The next year Lauridsen received a second commission to create an orchestral version. At this time he dropped the last movement and added an orchestral interlude near the end of the fifth.

Lauridsen has written,

....I took volumes of poetry to my island home in search of possible texts, including the complete works of the English poet, Robert Graves (1895 – 1965). In reading Graves, I became very much taken with the richness, elegance and extraordinary beauty of his poetry and his insights regarding the human experience. Five diverse poems with a common "winter" motif (a particular favorite of mine, rich in the paradoxical symbolism of dying/rejuvenation, light/darkness, sleeping/waking) suggested a cohesive cycle and led to the composition of Mid-Winter Songs.The cycle is cast in an overall arch form, framed by the intensely dramatic and passionate setting of the Lament for Pasiphaë and the gentle, prayerful Intercession in Late

October.

Lauridsen has explained that the piano part is not an accompaniment in the sense of being subordinate to the voices, but an equal partner. Some of the terms often used to describe his music are “mystical”, “luminous”, and “spiritual”, whether in a sacred or secular sense. This cycle also contains two movements which are breathlessly fast paced, with frequently changing meters.

Thomas Beveridge has had at least three musical lives. Following Harvard College, where he studied composition with Walter Piston and Randall Thompson, and studies with Nadia Boulanger in France, he became a professional singer, performing with the National Symphony, the Choral Arts Society in Washington, the Bethlehem Bach Choir, Philadelphia Singers, and New Amsterdam Singers. He gave many solo recitals, including some at the National Gallery and the Library of Congress.

His next life – as a choral conductor – has included leading the Washington Men’s Camerata, the National Men’s Chorus, and the New Dominion Chorale, with whom he regularly performs major choral/orchestral works. He has also served as chorus master of the Washington Opera at the Kennedy Center, and director of choral activities at George Mason University.

Beveridge has composed more than 375 works in many genres. In 1987 New Amsterdam Singers commissioned him to write a choral score which was given its premiere at Merkin Hall on a program of operatic choruses. Beveridge himself was bass soloist for that performance. Also in 1987 NAS performed the New York premiere of *Give me the Splendid, Silent Sun*, a work written in 1973 for the U.S. Army Chorus, and performed more than 50 times with that group.

Whitman is as treasured a poet by composers as is Dickinson. *Give me the Splendid, Silent Sun* starts as a hymn to nature, but the poet has a change of heart – the bass soloist sings “..confronting, reversing my cries.” The poem ends as a celebration of the city in all its throbbing life. Whitman, writing near the beginning of the Civil War, mentions Manhattan’s Broadway, evidently a mustering point for soldiers. (Whitman later served as a nurse in army hospitals; poignant verse came from that experience.) Beveridge’s setting for men’s voices and piano includes show-time [beguine](#) rhythms, marches, and bravura piano passages.

Kitty Brazelton is a composer of opera, choral, chamber and orchestral works, as well as a rock singer/band leader, and high-tech “savant.” Her bands – Hildegurls (Lincoln Center Festival), Dadadah (The Knitting Factory, Rolling Stone), What Is It Like To Be A Bat? (Tzadik Records, Gramophone, The Stone), Musica Orbis (Billboard, Harvard’s Sanders Theater), and Hide the Babies (CBGB) – have brought her worldwide acclaim, while her CD, *Chamber Music for the Inner Ear*, featuring performances by the Manhattan Brass Quintet, California EAR Unit and members of Kristjan Järvi’s Absolute Ensemble, garnered her an NPR cameo. Her latest opera, *Cat’s Tale*, libretto by the late George Plimpton, received a mid-summer premiere at the Central Park Zoo. A 9-year project, *ecclesiastes: a modern oratorio for male vocal quartet, cello, and percussion*, has just been made available on Innova Recordings. Besides composing and performing, Brazelton teaches music at Bennington College where she has been a professor since

2001.

In 2008 Brazelton was commissioned by the Minneapolis-based professional choir, Vocal Essence, to write *O Joy*. Today, NAS presents the New York premiere of this piece, for which Ms. Brazelton did her own translation of Psalm 77, adding words of her own. The piece incorporates both Renaissance-style counterpoint and pop elements. At one point the altos and tenors serve as “back up singers” to the main melody. Later there is a gospel hymn, and a fade-out at the end.