

Chorus to Feature Bach's "St. John Passion"

On Palm Sunday, April 17th, the Williamsport Civic Chorus will usher in the Christian Holy Week with a 3 P.M. performance of J.S. Bach's "St. John Passion". We are thrilled to be presenting this concert in the acoustically pleasing sanctuary of St. Mark's Lutheran Church in downtown Williamsport.

Directed by Ned Wetherald, the Chorus will be accompanied by a 16-piece chamber orchestra. Exceptionally talented vocal soloists from throughout the region will recount the dramatic story of Jesus' betrayal and suffering. Bach's score is brilliant, with special choruses portraying the gathered crowds, and Lutheran hymns offering interludes of reflection. Soloists include:

Richard Kennedy, tenor, sings the Evangelist role. A full professor of music at Penn State University, Mr. Kennedy has appeared as a soloist with premier musical organizations in this country and abroad. He last performed with the Civic Chorus in 2005, as Obadiah in Felix Mendelssohn's "Elijah". Mr. Kennedy studied voice at Indiana and Boston Universities, was a student of Phyllis Curtin, and completed advanced training at the Franz Schubert Institute in Baden, Austria.

Nathan Gilbertson, bass, was awarded a music performance scholarship to Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, where he trained with Rene Clausen and David Hamilton and sang with the Concordia Choir. Credentialed as a physician's assistant, Gilbertson is new to the Williamsport area, and he is delighted to

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Richard Kennedy

Nathan Gilbertson





Jason Moyer

Denise Connor



Singers' Corner

To sing well, it makes sense that singers stay well. Choristers are not only instrumentalists; we are the instruments, too. Here are some thoughts from Robert T. Sataloff, M.D., an expert in voice medicine. With a specialty practice in Philadelphia, Dr. Sataloff not only has all the

requisite training in medicine and surgery (otolaryngology), he also has a second doctorate degree. Rather than the more usual research or basic science Ph.D, Dr. Sataloff has a doctorate in voice performance from Combs College of Music, obtained while already a practicing physician!

His textbook, *Professional Voice:* The Science and Art of Clinical Care (2006), advises vocal hygiene for singers at all levels.

<u>Hydration</u>—drinking plenty of fluids is the most important thing a

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NILLIAMSFORT CIVIC CHORUS

Ned's Notes...



Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) wrote the "Saint John Passion" for his first Good Friday (April 7, 1724) in a new job that he would hold until his death 26 years later. In Leipzig it was the tradition to alternate Good Friday services between Saint Thomas Church and Saint Nicholas Church. Unfortunately, no one told Bach about this tradition until several days before Good Friday. Bach had been planning on using the largest church in Leipzig, St. Thomas, but it was the year for St. Nicholas, so Bach had to scramble to make room for the larger than usual orchestra. The "Passion" would have been presented with a sermon between Part 1 and Part 2. You may be comforted to know that we will forego the sermon. The overall structure used by Bach comes from Chapters 18 and 19 of the Gospel of John, using Martin Luther's translation, of course. It is the story of Jesus' last hours leading up to his crucifixion. Whether you are Christian or not, this story is full of drama and intense emotions.

As with his other compositions, Bach started with a traditional musical form and brought together the best practices of his era to create one of the finest examples of the form, in this case, the Passion. Bach uses music of action and commentary to develop the drama. The main characters in the drama tell their own story -- principally Jesus, Peter, Pilate, and the narrating Evangelist. They use the recitative to tell their story. The recitative is paced like speech and involves sparse accompaniment of the continuo (organ, harpsichord, cello, bass, and bassoon). Bach even has other eyewitnesses - a maid, a servant, and others - join in telling the action of this drama. The chorus plays the part of the crowd and sings choruses that are part of this action, often in dramatic form. as Bach uses that music to paint the text. So, even without the words, you can get a sense of what the crowd is shouting. Blended in with the music of action is musical commentary. This music is either performed by separate soloists who sing operatic arias that comment on the action or as the chorus sings chorales or hymns. In earlier Passion settings, the congregation would sing the hymns. In this setting, the chorus represents the voice of the people and comments on the action through lovely harmonizations of what would have been familiar hymns in Bach's time. Perhaps the most striking ones are the first chorus, which is an imposing hymn of praise, and the last chorus, which is a wondrous, comforting lullaby. Even though Bach always felt that the ending should be grander, he concludes this masterpiece with a simple and direct fourpart setting of a chorale.

We will be singing the "Saint John Passion" in English. There are good arguments to sing this work,

composed by a German, with the German words in mind. There are equally good reasons to sing this work in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, in 2011 in English. I suppose ideally we would all know enough German to understand the text, but that would be rare, and I further believe that Bach himself would encourage us to sing this work in English today, because having the listener understand the story was of utmost importance to him. Bach was a devout Lutheran, and this was an exercise of faith for him. Certainly he used his considerable skills at music composition to carry the words as exquisitely as possible, but the words were the most important aspect.

We have assembled a wonderful group of musicians as choristers, soloists, and instrumentalists to perform this masterpiece for you. Anytime the "Saint John Passion" is performed, it is an event. To perform the "Saint John Passion" on Palm Sunday in the marvelous acoustics of Saint Mark's Lutheran Church with this wonderful assembly of musicians will be an event, for sure. We look forward to seeing you April 17th.



"Ned's Notes" is provided for the enjoyment of our readers by Ned Wetherald. Currently in his fourteenth year as music director of the Williamsport Civic Chorus, Ned is minister of music at State College Presbyterian Church. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees in music and choral conducting from Shenandoah University.





"St. John Passion", continued

(Continued from page 1) engage in music with the Civic Chorus, presently in the role of Jesus.

Bass Jason Moyer graduated from Lycoming College with a bachelor's degree in three majors. A certified financial planner, Mr. Moyer is a founding partner of Hudock Moyer Wealth Resources. He has served on the boards of many local arts organizations and is often found directing and/or acting in Community Theatre League shows.

Soprano **Denise Connor** teaches English at Montoursville Area High School, where she directs the fall play. A member of the Williamsport Chamber Choir, Mrs. Connor is also the Director of Music at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church. She has performed many times on the stage of the Community Theatre League, and she and husband Michael are the very busy parents of three children, ages 6 months to 6 years.

Others deserving mention for "St. John Passion" are Jan Mianulli, mezzo-soprano, with degrees from Westminster Choir College and Penn State University who teaches voice Lycoming College and Juniata College. She also performs with the State College Choral Society and was an invited soloist with the Civic Chorus in "Elijah". Nicholas Buckman is Pilate. A Community Theatre League regular and longtime member and soloist with the Chorus, he took the role of Samuel in "The Pirates of Penzance" in our most recent concert. He is employed by the Community Arts Center as a theater technician. Michael Sole, tenor, has been singing in musicals and operas since age 13, including during his



Jan Mianulli



Nicholas Buckman



Michael Sole

67th SEASON

"St. John Passion"

by J.S. Bach

Sunday, April 17th, 2011

St. Mark's Lutheran Church

3 PM

Tickets may be purchased at Robert M. Sides Family Music Center, The Otto Book Store, and at the door

Reception to follow

Looking ahead to next season

The Williamsport Civic Chorus will present an exciting line-up for 2011-12. Called "Bluebloods and Bluegrass", our 68th season slates two major concerts:

An Evening at Eisenstadt with orchestra and soloists will include music commissioned by the Esterhazy family in the Kingdom of Hungary, now Slovakia. Featured composers will be Haydn, Cherubini, and Beethoven.

Bluegrass. A bluegrass band will join the Chorus in a performance of Carol Barnett's "The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass" and selections from the film, "O Brother, Where Art Thou?"

On Monday, April 18th, 20% of the bill goes to the Chorus when you dine at **Hoss' Steak & Sea House** on the Golden Strip. Please phone 323-4548 for the required ticket.

Visit us at www.lycoming.org/wcc Mail to: wccmail@yahoo.com



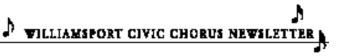
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"The Williamsport Civic Chorus is an open community of singers dedicated to making fine music accessible to all through education, participation, and inspiration."

(Continued from page 1) singer can do, as well as breathing through the nose whenever possible.

Nutrition—the stomach theoretically should be empty to permit the diaphragm to move readily, but low blood sugar and a growling tummy are not conducive to focused singing, either. To avoid phlegm singers may forego dairy products, chocolate, and caffeine on performance days. Small food portions, post-concert, also help control acid reflux, a common problem among us (>80%) due to flexion of the abdominal muscles during singing.

Rest—nighttime exertion and bright stage lights, which lower melatonin secretion, can make it hard to fall asleep. As with other off-shift workers, a 20-minute afternoon nap can be helpful to promote mental alertness.

<u>Fitness</u>—mild aerobic exercise is recommended for the breath support that is so important to good singing technique. Daily vocal exercises, too, especially for the episodic singer, maintain musculature. Finally, the demands of concert week can be managed by proper warmups, pacing, and cooling down.

Voice abuse, avoid it during singing and speaking—do not oversing in noisy environments (for choral singers this means when accompanied by orchestras), refrain from shouting at kids and at sporting events, and avoid alcohol abuse, tobacco and other environmental smoke, as well as pollutants from stage sets, etc.

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