

hitting the high Notes.

A Newsletter From  WILLIAMSPORT CIVIC CHORUS

Volume 14, No. 1 Oct., 2011
Barbara Hemmendinger, editor

Fusing Classical & Bluegrass on Nov. 20th



On Sunday, November 20th, 3:00 PM, at St. Luke Lutheran Church in Williamsport, the Williamsport Civic Chorus will perform Carol Barnett's unique composition called *The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass*. Joining forces with soloists and a bluegrass band composed of Kate B. Johnston (fiddle), Chris Wheeland (string bass), Tim Breon (guitar), John Welshans (banjo), and Karl Fisher (mandolin), we

will sing this incredibly beautiful piece of traditional choral music and so doing, bring bluegrass to our classical audience for the first time.

The 35-minute mass is comprised of 12 parts and follows the usual sacred structure, with a modern li-

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Singers' Corner



The Dalai Lama, when asked what surprised him most about humanity, answered "Man. Because he sacrifices his health in order to make money. Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his

health. And then he is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present; the result being that he does not live in the present or the future; he lives as if he is never going to die, and then

dies having never really lived."

Life happens, and we find ourselves adjusting to many things, good and bad. That is

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Ned's Notes...





What do you get when you combine elements of ragtime, country music, roots music, mountain music, gospel music, old time music, folk music, and jazz? You get bluegrass music!

Bluegrass music developed in the 1920's and 1930's from musicians with roots in all those musical elements listed above. Bill Monroe is considered by most to be the grandfather of Bluegrass. His band, which included his brother, and later included Lester Flatts and Earl Scruggs, was one of the most prominent groups in the early days. In fact, it is said that the name for this style of music, bluegrass, came from the fact that Monroe was from Kentucky, the Blue Grass State, and the band was called the Blue Grass Boys. Bluegrass Music is generally played by acoustic instruments (originally probably from necessity – there was little or no electric service in the rural areas) including bass, fid-

dle, mandolin, guitar, and banjo. Other instruments are sometimes used, but these five are the core of most bluegrass music.

What do you get when you combine bluegrass music with a classical composer and a premier choral ensemble? You get *The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass*.

Carol Barnett, the classical composer and music professor at Augsburg College (MN), was asked by friends if she knew anything about bluegrass. She didn't! As discussions continued, she learned a little about bluegrass music and was commissioned by VocalEssence, the premier choral ensemble, to compose a piece that combined classical choral writing with traditional bluegrass music, and *The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass* was born. Part of the early charm was the way *Bluegrass Mass* trips off the tongue, but the classic and traditional form of the mass also helped wed the two musical styles.

Marisha Chamberlain wrote the libretto to *A Bluegrass Mass*. She took the traditional texts and modernized them, and in a sense, Americanized them, by using folk-like verses to unify the entire work. Chamberlain took liberties with the text and, in so doing, interpreted the Christian text in a more universal and secular manner.

We have assembled our own bluegrass band from exceptional local talent to accompany the Chorus, recognizing that *A Bluegrass Mass* presents interesting challenges for instrumentalists as well

as singers. And to insure that our audience gets a good dose of bluegrass, we have added several pieces of traditional bluegrass music to the program. The movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* caused an immense resurgence in bluegrass music, so we will sing “Down to the River to Pray” and “I Am a Man of Constant Sorrow” from that Grammy-winning soundtrack. We will also sing “Mountain Music,” made famous by the group Alabama. There will be a few other treats in store, including a bluegrass sing-a-long!

We hope you will join us for a “foot stompin’ good time” on Sunday, November 20th, 3:00 PM, at St. Luke Lutheran Church. 🎵



“Ned’s Notes” is provided for the enjoyment of our readers by Ned Wetherald. Currently in his fifteenth 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.



Patrons Reminder

The Civic Chorus patron campaign is underway. With this season’s flat line, austerity funding, your support is even more vital! Please let us count on you. For more information, email us at wccmail@yahoo.com Thanks!

Happy Birthday, Bill Monroe

There is no mention of him in the *Grove Dictionary of Music*, yet this gentleman who would have been 100 years old on September 13th had a profound influence on contemporary American music. Bill Monroe, affectionately dubbed the “Father of Bluegrass”, reached beyond that genre to country music, the folk revival, and even rock ‘n’ roll.

Monroe, the youngest of eight children born on his family’s farm near Rosine, Kentucky, lived a hard-scrabble life of poverty and rejection. Because older siblings already played fiddle and guitar, a mandolin was all that was left for him, and Bill and a fiddle-playing uncle with whom Bill lived after being orphaned, would eke out some income by performing at dances. Years later, Monroe would record those remembered tunes and meld them with blues numbers acquired by playing alongside an African-American musician, Arnold Shultz, during the highly-segregated 1920’s. Monroe continued to combine black and white musical traditions during the 1930’s, eventually developing the style that we know as bluegrass. By 1936, he had taken this music on tour with his brother Charlie in a band called the Blue Grass Boys.

Bill and various personnel of the Blue Grass Boys continued playing for the next 58 years. Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly

would become big fans, and college students during the early 1960’s would eventually “discover” Monroe, associating his style more with traditional folk music than with the country-and-western genre. This culminated in the publication of a feature article in the influential magazine *Sing Out!* that first publicly referred to Monroe as the “Father of Bluegrass”. There have been loyal bluegrass audiences ever since, and events and festivals have become common, with fans traveling great distances to attend regional performances.

In April, 1996, Monroe suffered a stroke that ended his performing career. He died on September 9th of that year, four days shy of his 85th birthday. Music had been his life and “bluegrass” his autobiography. 🎵

“This performance is supported in part by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.”



68th SEASON

“The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass”

by Carol Barnett

Sunday, November 20th, 2011
St. Luke Lutheran Church
1400 Market St., Williamsport
3 PM

“An Evening at Eisenstadt”

music of Haydn & Beethoven

Sunday, April 29th, 2012
St. Mark’s Lutheran Church
142 Market St., Williamsport

3 PM

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bretto penned by the writer and poet, Marisha Chamberlain. There are solos, parts for the choir alone, parts for the bluegrass band, and then pieces that bring the choir and the band together. Some parts are in English and others in Latin.

In addition to the mass, the Chorus and band will perform other down-home pieces. We are excited about this fusion concert and know that you will love the sparkling melodies and vibrant rhythms. Tickets for our performance and complimentary reception will be available at the door and as of November 1st, at the Robert M. Sides Family Music Center, the Otto Book Store, and from Chorus members. 🎵



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CIVIC CHORUS**

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WILLIAMSPORT CIVIC CHORUS NEWSLETTER

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

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called stress. Too much to do or too little, financial struggles, changes in relationships, jobs, family, health and illness, even (and recently, quite significantly) the weather. It is remarkable that Civic Chorus singers choose to get together at all to rehearse for two hours on Monday nights. Doing so in the midst of everything often brings about focus and peace. While hearing music in itself may be calming, singing in a group is social and supportive.

Our fast-paced world overvalues multi-tasking. The “free three”—laughter, music, and nature—beckon us to live one moment at a time, taking care to practice the mindfulness without judgment that our Buddhist friends describe. Its rewards are deep and re-energizing, even after an arduous rehearsal. 🎵



**Visit our brand new website:
www.williamsportcivicchorus.org**

Fundraisers

Wolfgang Candy sale from October 3rd through October 24th, with delivery by Thanksgiving.
Avon fundraiser from October 10th through October 31st.
Hoss' Steak & Sea House dinner, Monday, November 21st. With a Chorus coupon, 20% of the bill goes to us.

