

hitting the high Notes

A Newsletter From  WILLIAMSPORT
CIVIC CHORUS

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Barbara Hemmendinger, editor

A “Glorious Christmas” with the Chorus & brass choir!

On Sunday, December 13th, at 3 pm, let’s usher in a resplendent time of year as the Chorus teams with a brass choir and percussion ensemble to present a “Glorious Christmas”.

John Rutter’s (1945-) popular *Gloria* is the centerpiece of this concert. The rest of the program will feature Daniel Pinkham’s (1923-2006) *Christmas Cantata* and a number of well and lesser-known Christmas arrangements by Eric Whitacre, Ola Gjeillo, Pavel Tchesnokov, and others.

St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, 142 Market Street in Williamsport provides the perfect acoustic

setting for this music. As the performers reflect the expectancy of Advent and the joy of Christmas, we hope the audience will experience deep passion and beauty from these carefully crafted compositions.

Accompanied by an 8-piece brass choir plus xylophone, timpani, and organ, the 50-member Chorus under the direction of Michael Connor will set your mood for December’s festivities.

Tickets for a “Glorious Christmas” are available in advance at the Robert M. Sides Family Music Center, at the Otto Book Store, and from Chorus

members, with pre-sale purchases receiving a \$2 discount off the box office prices of \$12 for general admission and \$10 for seniors and students. Children 12 years of age and younger will be admitted without charge when accompanied by a ticketed adult. Following the concert, members of the audience are invited to socialize with the performers at a reception offering light refreshments.

We look forward to seeing you on December 13th! 🎵

Singers’ Corner



Freud believed that psychological well-being derives from a good balance of work, love, and play. Of those involvements, work and play may occur alongside other people or alone, but love in its many forms requires relationship. So it is not surprising when performers who work hard at their crafts and enjoy what they do also choose to share that experience with folks close to

them. Our December concert personnel; for example, includes 22 people from ten different family groups of two or more participants.

To have some fun getting to know those connections, try your hand at the word find puzzle on page 4. There are 27 proper names to be found of our family group musicians. All first names are embedded, and in

many cases, both first and last names are included. (Hint: there are foils, non-singers, and four duplicated given names—“Deb”, “Steve”, “Phoebe”, and “Barb”).

Answers to the puzzle will be available at the concert box office as well as on the Chorus’ website, williamsportcivicchorus.org. As Dr. Freud might say, “Play on!”

(Continued on page 4)

Know the Score



Michael Connor

My son stops me while we are at the store before Halloween. "Dad, why are there Christmas things out already? Can't we just enjoy Halloween first?" Before Thanksgiving, Christmas music can be found on the radio. A friend of mine pointed out that a station in nearby South Jersey starts broadcasting holiday cheer on about the 17th of October...

Ah, Christmas music. It may seem easy to get sick of it by mid-December. Especially when we hear the same playlist of songs repeatedly. It isn't that these aren't great songs, it is just that too much of a good thing can get old quickly, right?

Well, I am here to let you know that I have been jamming to our December concert music all summer. In fact, while I was clipping around the yard, mowing it down to a respectable length, my playlist of John Rutter's *Gloria* and Pinkham's *Christmas Cantata* blasted in my ears. And here is why!

John Rutter has been hailed by NBC's "Today" show as "the world's greatest living composer and conductor of choral music." His works

have been performed all over the world.

The *Gloria* has an American connection. It was commissioned in 1974 by Olson's Voices of Mel Olson's chorale of Omaha, Nebraska. The world premiere took place under the baton of the composer himself and marked Rutter's first visit to the United States. In a telephone interview from his home in England, Rutter said, "We wanted to use a familiar text, so I chose '*Gloria in excelsis Deo*' - what the angels sing at the birth of Christ." He continued, "I look back on it with gratitude because it was the work that put me on the map internationally."

Many think that the *Gloria* is his best work. It is brilliant, festive, splashy and has great audience appeal. It is wonderfully challenging to prepare and terribly rewarding to sing in concert. As a performer, it feels like a wild rollercoaster filled with all sorts of loops and flips, that when the ride is over...one is left both exhausted and refreshed at the same time.

After finishing up my back yard and about the time I headed into the front, the low brass blast of Pinkham's *Christmas Cantata* kept me right on track.

Christmas Cantata composer and teacher Daniel Pinkham served as organist and choir director of Boston's historic King's Chapel for 42 years and on the faculty of the New England Conservatory of Music. *Christmas Cantata* (1957) is one of his most popular works, and it reflects his love of early as well as contemporary music. Set for chorus, two brass choirs, and organ, the work's Latin text comes from traditional responses to the Christmas mass. So far so good, but the *Can-*

tata is tricky with complicated mixed meter and a harmonic structure that can make college music theory students tremble. Singing it presents a multitude of issues. Each part makes little sense by itself at points, but when layered and performed with the other voices, it weaves a thoroughly thought out and executed masterpiece of American choral literature that audiences will enjoy seamlessly.

And in a final thought about my yard... The winter season is blowing in with its typical drudgery of shoveling. What will you be listening to? For me? The Beach Boys. 🎵



"*Know the Score*" is provided for the enjoyment of our readers by Michael Connor. Currently in his inaugural year as music director of the Williamsport Civic Chorus, Michael comes to us from the Harmonia Gesang Verein, where he is entering his third year as conductor. He holds a master's degree in education with music specialization from Bucknell University, serving as a graduate assistant to Dr. William Payn there. Connor currently teaches choral music at Central Mountain Middle School in Clinton County and has also appeared as a frequent vocal soloist with the Chorus and with numerous other performing organizations. Along with his wife Denise, Michael is a proud parent of Aidan, Gabrielle, and Liam.

"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."

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72nd SEASON

Glorious Christmas

Sunday, Dec. 13, 2015

3 pm

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
142 Market St., Williamsport

Regional Premiere:

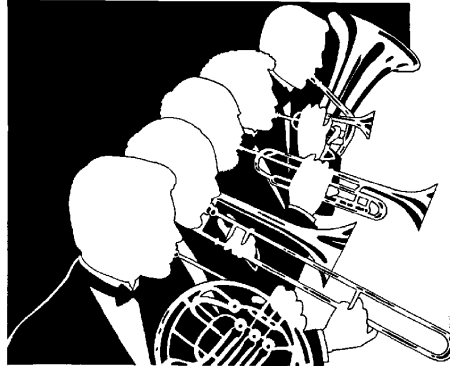
Karl Jenkins' *Requiem*

Sunday, Apr. 24, 2016

3 pm

Williamsport Area High School
Auditorium

The Brass Choir



Choral singers are forever grateful to have special accompaniment, and the brass choir engaged for the “Glorious Christmas” concert will fit that bill. Defined by the Norton/Grove Concise Encyclopedia of Music as “a homogenous group of instruments within a larger group,” a brass choir is traditionally used for Christmas music. That begs the question, of course, of how that now-common practice originated.

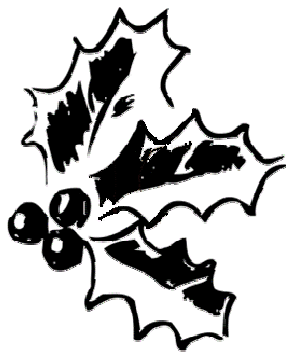
The words “high”, “bright”, “light”, and “clear” apply equally well to the sonority of brass ensembles as well as to the architecture of many sanctuaries in which they play, St. Mark’s included. Might brass instruments, like the organ, be sought for their ability to fill high spaces with transparent sound? Consider the herald trumpet’s use in ceremonial occasions and the lone trumpeter in a tower serving as a sentinel for medieval European towns.

Although there is chamber music literature dating back to the

Renaissance for brass ensembles, it was not until Wagner’s time in the past century that modern brass choirs were born. They employ many pitched trumpets, horns, trombones, euphoniums, tubas, and percussionists in various combinations. Their sound is both symphonically rich and capable of powerful dynamics.

Contemporary brass quintets began in the 1940’s, created first in Chicago. By the 1960’s, the Eastman Brass Quintet had appeared, but it was the founding in 1970 of the Canadian Brass, several of whose members were mentored by Chicago Brass Quintet teachers, that really put these ensembles on center stage. Other significant brass quintets followed, such as the Empire Brass in 1972 and the German Brass in 1974. Drawing on virtuoso musicians as their members, it is noteworthy that the late Rolf Smedvig (Boston Symphony first-trumpet player and Music Director of the Williamsport Symphony Orchestra from 1984-92) as well as local percussionist Bob Leidhecker are former Empire Brass Quintet players with Williamsport connections.

As many new brass ensembles and choirs have formed around the world, their repertoire continues to expand across musical genres. This exciting and unique group of instruments inspires composers, musicians, and audiences, just as Williamsport Civic Chorus Christmas concert attendees will be inspired, too.



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



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

R I R A T T A B A I C C O E S M A *(Continued from page 1)*
 N A L U A P E K A M F J E M I H M
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WORD FIND
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