

Note worthy

The newsletter of the South Hills Chorale

February, 2014

STAFF

Music Director

Phil Aley

Assistant Director

Erich Lascek

Accompanist

Kathy Whittaker

Business Manager

Rick Smith

BOARD of DIRECTORS

President

Dennis Sweeney

President Elect

Ted Symons

Treasurer

Andrea Walczak

Secretary

Sue Mazur

Past President

Brian Johnston

Membership

Elaine Moore

Susan Bloom

Show Chairperson

Karen Christensen

Music Librarian

Renie Minniti

Development

Audrey Moeller

Financial Advisor

Don Moore

Ticket Chair

Pat Moraytis

Costume Chairs

Mary Seibert

Carol Steffen

Equipment Manager

Bill Groll

Noteworthy Staff

Dennis Sweeney

Karen Gennari



The Director's Corner

MESSAGE TO A GREAT CHOIR!

We're in the middle of the "work session" to craft another concert - sometimes seemingly tedious! Be sure to use all the "help tools" we suggest at rehearsals so you're coming on Mondays well-prepared! Try your best not to miss any rehearsals and before you know it, we will have a great holiday concert! Got my attention the other day when I realized that the end of Thanksgiving weekend, Monday December first, WE WILL BE DOING A PROGRAM FOR FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE! Don't let yourself get "bogged down" in this "learning period" - Feel free to help each other in this process!

Also, many thanks to all of you that expressed concern about my recent "bout" with A-fib! I think I have it under control but your "well-wishes" meant so much to me and Winnie. And to Eric, JOB WELL DONE! on stepping in with very little warning!

It's such a joy to be a member of the South Hills Chorale family!

Phil

C, E flat, and G walk into a bar. The bartender says, "Sorry, no minors."

Hints for Singers

This is a quick trick that makes you sound better instantly. Say A-E-I-O-U (watch your jaw movement in the mirror). Did your jaw close on any of the vowels? Chances are your jaw closed on the "E" and the "U"—and most likely on others too, if not all of them. Take your first two fingers and pull your jaw down two inches—or even better, use a plastic bottle cap or a wine cork to prop your jaw open. Now speak the vowels again. And repeat again (we're trying to reprogram muscle memory—so the more the better).

Now sing the vowels on one pitch. A-E-I-O-U. Your goal is to keep your jaw open (long not wide) without closing for all of your vowels. Repeat until you can do it. Now sing a phrase of one of your songs—and make sure your jaw opens to the same position on all of your vowels. You have to practice this a bunch before it becomes natural—but the more you do, the sooner this new movement is programmed into your muscle memory.

From Cari Cole's
Singing Tips

Manager's Musings

In the last newsletter I promised to write about each leg of the three legged stool of Chorale membership—Singing, Socializing and Fund Raising. I will address the issue of fund raising and why it is necessary. Virtually all organizations have to pay the bills in order to stay in operation. You have to pay a certain amount in order to participate in nearly everything from churches to bowling leagues. Without your financial support they would not be able to function. The Chorale is no different. We need your financial help to produce all of the great concerts that we perform. Your dollars go toward purchasing music, paying rehearsal and performance venue rentals, musician fees, administrative costs and salaries to name a few. The difference with the Chorale is that you have the opportunity to sell ads, tickets, Enjoy books, and other things to meet or exceed your minimum dollar requirement instead of paying from your own funds.

Since we are primarily a member driven organization, our success is a reflection of your efforts. I think that we can be proud of the fact that our hard work in fund raising enables us to do what we do best—bring joy to the community through song. Apparently RAD agrees that we are a regional asset worth funding.

Thank you for your dedication to our success.
Rick Smith

Little Known Fact

Randall Thompson's *Alleluia* was commissioned by Boston Symphony conductor Serge Koussevitsky in 1940 for the opening of the Berkshire Music Festival. He wanted a fanfare for voices, something exciting and bold. Instead, Thompson composed a quiet, introspective piece influenced by the early years of the Second World War and the fall of France.

The Festival's opening date was July 8. Thompson was so occupied with other commissions that he was unable to begin work on *Alleluia* until July first. He completed the work and delivered it to the festival chorus for rehearsal on July 8, 45 minutes before the performance. The choral director was reported to have said, "Well, text at least is one thing we won't have to worry about."

Thompson wrote of the piece.

The word "Alleluia" has so many possible interpretations. The music in my particular Alleluia cannot be made to sound joyous. It is a slow, sad piece, and...here it is comparable to the Book of Job, where it is written, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Musical Quotes

“One good thing about music, when it hits you, you feel no pain.”

— Bob Marley

“And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music.”

— Friedrich Nietzsche

“Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness.”

— Maya Angelou

“He has Van Gogh’s ear for music.”

— Billy Wilder

“To stop the flow of music would be like the stopping of time itself, incredible and inconceivable.”

— Aaron Copeland

“There are two golden rules for an orchestra: start together and finish together. The public doesn’t give a damn what goes on in between.”

— Thomas Beecham

Our Newest Members

This fall we welcomed eight new singers. Here are brief sketches of their backgrounds.



Christy Kozar, First Soprano

Christy first heard about the Chorale from Debbie Boughner, a fellow teacher at the West Mifflin Area School District.

She became seriously involved in singing during her high school years. She took voice lessons for six years--from 9th grade through her sophomore year in college. She was a member of her high school choir as well as the Slippery Rock Choir. Additionally, Christy performed in high school and college musicals and in The Butler Musical Theater Guild during college.

For the past several years, Christy has sung the Star Spangled Banner at various venues, including high school sporting events, and she has sung at weddings. More recently, she has contributed her vocal talents to the West Mifflin Middle School's annual talent shows.

Christy's most memorable singing experience is a recent one. Last year at her middle school's talent show, she sang "Let it Go" with her five-year-old daughter Elizabeth.



Carol Stasik, Second Soprano

Carol is a Pittsburgh native who has been coming to Chorale concerts for several years with a friend. At our spring concert she was impressed by our musicality and decided to join us this fall.

Both of Carol's parents are singers and her sister is a professional musician. She has been involved with singing since grade school. She has sung Gilbert and Sullivan with the Pittsburgh Savoyards and has done musical comedies with the Camelot Players and the Baldwin/South Park Theatre. She also sings in her church choir.

Carol's most memorable musical experiences have been singing Steven Sondheim's *A Little Night Music* and *Company*. She likes the demands Sondheim makes on singers, its musicality, and its difficulty.

Another Little Known Fact

The tune for “O Holy Night” was composed by the French composer Adolphe Adam in 1847 to accompany the poem “Minuit, chrétiens” (Midnight Christians). It was written by wine merchant Placide Cappeau to celebrate the renovation of the church organ in the French village Roquemaure.

Initially, the song was widely popular, sung across France. When the clergy realized that Cappeau was anticlerical and an atheist and Adam was Jewish and did not celebrate Christmas the song was denounced by the church. Yet, it continued to be sung.

The English version of the poem was written by Unitarian minister John Sullivan Dwight in 1855. His version, the one sung by the Chorale, loosely follows Cappeau’s sentiments but is not a direct translation. As a strong abolitionist, Dwight identified strongly with his third verse, “Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother; and in his name all oppression shall cease.”

Susan Beresik, First Alto

First alto Susan Beresik had been a member of the South Hills Chorale for more than ten years, mostly during the 1990’s. She took voice lessons for a long time, which led to participation in the Pittsburgh Concert Choir, the Bach choir, and, most notably, the Mendelssohn Choir, where she sang for nine years. She has also been a cantor and choir member at St. Benedict the Abbot Church in Peters Township.

Susan’s most memorable choral experience was singing with the Pittsburgh Symphony as a member of the Mendelssohn.



Laura McChesney, First Alto

First alto Laura McChesney learned about the Chorale from her friend and co-worker Sue Lambert. She began her musical journey with piano lessons at age seven. At McGuffey High School, she was a member of the Campus Life Singers, and for one year during college at Pitt, she was a member of the Heinz Chapel Choir, an internationally recognized a cappella choir. Right out of college, she joined the Pittsburgh Concert Chorale in Wexford.

When Laura heard about the South Hills Chorale, she realized that it is quite similar to the Heinz Chapel Choir with the same musical repertoire; thus, she was anxious to join.

Laura’s most memorable singing experience was a three-week tour of Eastern Europe with the Heinz Chapel Choir.

Renée Edwards, Second Soprano

Renée was recruited for the Chorale by Phil Aley who noted her singing talent in church.

Before joining us most of Renée’s singing experience was in high school. She attended Alderdice and was chosen to be a full member of their A Choir, the top singing group in the school. To help develop her voice she took singing lessons from her minister’s wife. Like most of us, she has sung in her church’s choir.

Renée’s most memorable moment was performing the complete Handel *Messiah*.

Quick 🎵 Notes

Carol of the Bells is based on the traditional Ukrainian folk chant *Shchedryk* (Bountiful). In pre-Christian Ukraine it was a song associated with the coming of spring. The original song told of a swallow returning and lambs being born as well as hopes for a prosperous year.

With the adoption of Christianity and the Julian calendar the song was repurposed to celebrate the Feast of Epiphany.

We Wish You a Merry Christmas is a traditional carol from the West Country of England. The song celebrates the custom of carolers wishing fortune and happy spirits at Christmas time.

Figgy pudding, the dish that the singers crave in the song, is more of a cake than a pudding. It is made of dried fruit, a special cake batter, and spices. References to it date back to the mid-1600s. Traditional recipes also call for large doses of cognac and rum. The dish was banned by the Puritans, probably because of the alcohol content.

François Rouze, Tenor

François is another Bill Groll recruit. He learned about the Chorale at our RAD concert rehearsal and the Heinz History Center last fall as Bill's guest. A native of Briançon, France François is working in the United States with Bill at All Clad.

François has been singing all his life as part of his church choir. His father was the Minister of Culture in Briançon, so he was exposed to a wide variety of cultural events throughout his life.

His most memorable occasions are those where he hears the religious music of his childhood, especially Christmas carols. *Il est né, le divin Enfant*, a carol familiar to many of us, is one of his favorites.

Janet Bodner, First Soprano

First soprano Janet Bodnar has known of the Chorale for many years, having been introduced to us through a newspaper article.

Janet fell in love with choral music in 8th grade. She began taking private voice lessons and joined her middle school and high school choirs in Brooke County, West Virginia. Since then, she has sung in choirs at St. Matthew's Church in Wheeling and Greene Memorial United Methodist Church in Roanoke, Virginia. She moved to Mt. Lebanon in 1988 and joined the choirs of the Mt. Lebanon United Methodist Church and the Mt. Lebanon Presbyterian Church, where she sang for Phil What's His Name.

Janet's most memorable singing experience took place at Mt. Lebanon Presbyterian Church with a program, "The Joy of Christmas" under Phil's direction. Each Sunday school room was transformed into a Nativity scene, such as a shepherds' room, and the kings' room. One room depicted the Angel Gabriel's appearance to Mary while the *Magnificat* was sung. There Janet played the role of Mary. One day while Janet was buying eggs at Giant Eagle, a little boy pointed at her, and exclaimed, "Look, Mommy, it's Mary!" Talk about being a role model now!

Tom Stevick, Tenor

Tom and Bill Groll were college friends, and Bill introduced him to the Chorale. (Bill refused to comment on any of their college activities citing confidentiality issues.)

Tom spent the last 30 years in Michigan where he sang with a 100-voice all men's chorus, Measure For Measure. Upon returning to Pittsburgh he decided to join Bill and the Chorale.

Tom's most memorable musical experience was singing a solo in the musical *Mame*. His grandmother was in the audience, sitting in the front row, beaming with pride.

Notes on Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*

Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* is one of his most popular ballets. The story was taken from a rather dark adult fairy-tale by E.T.A. Hoffman, the writer who also inspired Offenbach's opera *The Tales of Hoffman*. Later Alexander Dumas made the story simpler, happier, and more appropriate for children.

While the ballet was premiered in St. Petersburg in 1892, it was not performed outside Russia until 1934 and in the United States in 1944. Its true popularity as a Christmas ballet was after George Balanchine's production by the New York City Ballet in 1954. Today major ballet companies generate up to 40% of their income from *Nutcracker* performances.

Tchaikovsky was in a low-key competition with his contemporaries, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky and others. To one-up them he had a celesta smuggled in to Russia and included this keyboard instrument with its bell-like sound into the *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*.

The Chorale's Unsung Heroes



Renie Minniti, Alto, Music Librarian

Renie is a Pittsburgh native who, for years, came to Chorale concerts as Kathy Quinn-Hodel's guest. At the time she was a flight attendant, and her job and travel responsibilities kept her from joining us. When she left the airlines she auditioned and became a member in 2003. She has been an active member ever since.

In 2008 the Chorale Librarian, Jan McCloud, asked Renie to help with taking care of our music, and for the next year she volunteered as our Assistant Librarian. In 2009, when Jan left the position, Renie agreed to take over these duties full time.

The Librarian's job, like the iceberg, is 90% hidden from sight. The Chorale has an extensive library that includes more than 600 separate pieces* with almost 50,000 individual copies of music. The job includes receiving new music which requires her to hole-punch each piece, listing them in the computer inventory, stamping each one with the Chorale's name, and labeling each piece for each singer. This can be time consuming since we order 90 copies of each musical selection. The second major task is recalling and reshelving music after each concert and then pulling and packaging around 700 pieces of music for us at the beginning of each singing season.

Renie's major challenge as our Librarian is getting music returned. While most singers are conscientious about returning their music, she faces special problems with folks who take leave, resign, or move away. On one occasion she had a person return music two years after leaving the Chorale.

When she isn't singing with us Renie babysits her grandson five days a week. Her non-singing hobbies include reading (mysteries), needlework, and traveling. Her most memorable experience with the Chorale was singing at Lincoln Center in Washington, D.C. and at Heinz Hall with the Allegheny Brass Band.

* At the moment Phil Aley and Karen Christensen are purging out-of-date music.

*From The Young Person's
Guide to the SATB Choir*

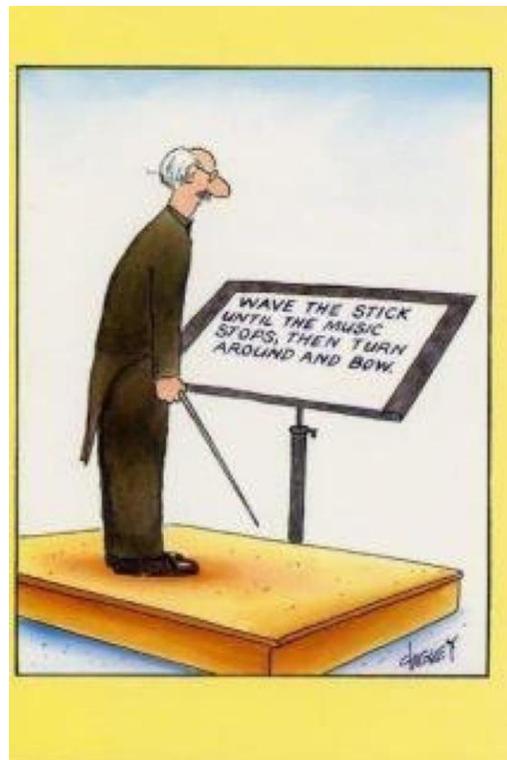
Basses sing the lowest of anybody. This basically explains everything. They are stolid, dependable people and have more facial hair than anybody else. The basses feel perpetually unappreciated, but they have a deep conviction that they are actually the most important part (a view endorsed by musicologists, but certainly not by sopranos or tenors), despite the fact that they have the most boring part of anybody and often sing the same note (or in endless fifths) for an entire page. They compensate for this by singing as loudly as they can get away with. Most basses are tuba players at heart. Basses are the only section that can regularly complain about how low their part is, and they make horrible faces when trying to hit very low notes.

Basses like altos...except when they have duets and the altos get the good part. As for the sopranos, they are simply in an alternate universe which the basses don't understand at all. They can't imagine why anybody would ever want to sing that high and sound that bad when they make mistakes. When a bass makes a mistake, the other three parts will cover him, and he can continue on his merry way, knowing that sometime, somehow, he will end up at the root of the chord.



Welcome Back to the Following Members

Karen Chesko Sherry Grossi Erin Snow
Jan Trombetta Larry Mayer Chuck Mateya



Music is the cup that holds the wine of silence.

Robert Fripp

How to Wake Up to Sing

From *Singing Hints and Tips*
by Dingwall & District Choral
Society

Stand quietly. Take a "sun breath." As you inhale through the nose (to the count of 4), raise your arms, keeping shoulders comfortably relaxed. If you are able to do so, touch your hands over your head. Exhale through your mouth to the count of 4 while gradually lowering your arms. Over time increase the count to 6 and then 8.

Gently shake your wrists. Flop your wrists in front of you. Shake your hands more vigorously as if trying to get water off them.

Move your elbows and hands in a circular manner. Wake up the arms.

Roll your shoulders in a circular manner up and back.

Extend one arm in front of your body, fingers pointed up. Pull gently to free the wrist. Point the fingers down. Pull gently to free the wrist. Repeat with the other arm.

Important Dates

October 20	Rehearsal, St. Paul's
October 27	Rehearsal, St. Paul's
November 3	Rehearsal, St. Paul's
November 10	Rehearsal, St. Paul's
November 11	Board Meeting
November 17	Rehearsal, St. Paul's
November 24	Rehearsal, St. Paul's
December 1	Friendship Village Concert, Upper St. Clair, 7:30 PM
December 5	Ameriprise Concert, Chadwick-Wexford, 8:30 PM
December 8	Rehearsal, St. Paul's
December 10	St. Francis Church Concert, Finleyville, 11:00 AM
December 15	Rehearsal, St. Paul's
December 16	Rehearsal, Westminster
December 17	Rehearsal, Westminster
December 19	Concert, Westminster
December 20	Concert, Westminster

Swans sing before they die— 't were no bad thing
Should certain persons die before they sing.
— Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Amazon Smile - Money for the Chorale

How to use Amazon Smile to support the Chorale.

- Log in to **Smile.Amazon.com** on your computer using your current user name and password.
- In the box labeled "Or pick your own charitable organization" enter *South Hills Chorale* and then click on the **Search** button. You will see South Hills Chorale Inc. listed.
- Click on the **Select**. The Chorale will be your permanent charity whenever you make a purchase from Amazon Smile. We will get 0.5% of the purchase price.
- Finally, order as you normally would from this site. There may be some purchase restrictions.

Be sure to [pass this information on](#) to family and friends before the holiday shopping season so we can get maximum benefit for the Chorale.

Sammy Quaver's Tips

Not all of us have daily access to a piano or know the differences between a diminished fifth and a half-full bottle of rum. But, there are things we can, and should, do to enhance our singing. Here are some homework suggestions.

- At home read through your music so there are no surprises on page turns, rests, and Phil-inspired jumps from page to page. While you do this focus on the comments the director has made so he does not have to repeat them week after week.
- Follow along with your music while listening to one of the recordings listed on this page. Here you can focus on tempo, rests, diction, and timing even if you don't sing your part. Try to get the music in your head.
- You will retain more of what we cover in rehearsal if you set aside time to review your music soon after Monday evening's practice. A day or two afterward is much better than waiting five or six days.

Following these hints will help you become better prepared for Monday night.

Where to Find It

Here are some links to online examples of the music we will be singing for the winter concert.

I'll Be Home For Christmas

<http://www.jwpepper.com/%27I-Be-Home-for-Christmas/10089174.item#.VCnEBRZ0b86>

Messiah

And the Glory of the Lord

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6yIlgN54R7k>

O thou that tellest good tidings of Zion

(Skip to 3:42 in the file to get the choral part.)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kgk-GiaCtY>

O Holy Night

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5n6X9sUznl>

White Christmas

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgVWgjjKWtQ>

Alleluia

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAhPD9zAlmI>

We Wish You a Merry Christmas

<http://listeninglab.stantons.com/title/we-wish-you-a-merry-christmas/219658/?s=1>

Twelve Days After Christmas

<http://listeninglab.stantons.com/title/twelve-days-after-christmas-the/11867/?s=1>

Nutcracker Jingles

<http://listeninglab.stantons.com/title/nutcracker-jingles/365272/?s=1>

(Silly, skip to 1:00 to get to the chorus, dancing anyone?)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcqHjFp8RFc>

Mozart's Fa-La-La

<http://listeninglab.stantons.com/title/mozarts-fa-la-la/231221/?s=1>

Chanukah Prayer

<http://listeninglab.stantons.com/title/chanukah-prayer/316696/?s=1>

Hodie Christus Natus Est

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv062nXEf3M>