



Quarter Notes

SPRING 2012



Happy singers at BCCO's annual fall retreat at Valley of the Moon Camp, in Glen Ellen, October 2011

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTIAN FRITZE

Message from Ming Luke, Music Director

On behalf of the Berkeley Community Chorus & Orchestra, I hope that you have had peaceful and restful holidays and a Happy New Year! The start of the new year means new repertoire for the chorus; this semester we will be delving into Dvořák's powerful *Requiem*. Though not played as often as his beautiful *Stabat Mater*, this masterpiece certainly has enough to keep us occupied for the entire semester. Known for his thrilling "From the New World" Symphony, Dvořák's music has the perfect mixture of seemingly familiar nostalgic melodies combined with the muscularity of the romantic-era orchestras. Each of his works is an instant classic; his concerti, symphonies, choral works, and chamber works are all favorites of musicians worldwide.

It is only appropriate that BCCO, a chorus made up of members from throughout the community, should take on the challenge of Dvořák's *Requiem*. Dvořák threw everything into this *Requiem*, from a marathon of a fugue based upon a 15th-century Czech tune (repeated twice!) to the hauntingly atmospheric and hushed opening whispers of "Requiem" and a beautiful "Pie Jesu" where the altos sing in unison with the tenors—perfect for our tenor section with many female singers! The entire work is woven from a four-note theme, a literal cross drawn on the page from a chromatic melody repeated over 120 times throughout the work. Each time you look or listen to the music, the more you discover and the more you realize the depth of this great composition.

But nothing is more satisfying than learning a work inside and out and then performing it for you, our family and community. Repertoire gains its life through performance. I hope to see you at the concerts, or feel free to stop by rehearsal and hear the work in progress!

NOTES FROM THE BOARD:

And so a new season of singing begins, our second with Music Director Ming Luke. We're engrossed in Dvořák's challenging *Requiem*, amazed by how much Ming has already taught us in the first few rehearsals. Like many chorus members, I listen to the music as I work at the computer, as I drive the car. I adore requiems, so much drama and emotion—the thrilling teetering on the edge of the abyss; the yearning, often desperate, cry for relief; the soaring elation and peaceful gratitude; the recurring dark undertones. I hope you'll join us at our May concerts for a roller coaster of emotion!

In our 46th year, BCCO is a vibrant community chorus of about 230 singers, offering the opportunity to sing magnificent choral works without the barrier of an audition and to perform with **continued on page 2**

Sheldon Wolfe

by Elaine Hooker Jackson

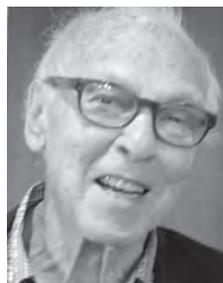
Sheldon Wolfe sees himself as “an OK saloon singer. I’d give myself 2½, 3, not 4 bells.” But he has always loved singing. Several years ago when BCCO performed Brahms’s *German Requiem*, he fell in love with the funeral march and was moved to join the chorus.

BCCO had been in the family. In fact, he says he was “a chorus widower.” His wife, Nancy, has been on the board for about 15 years and is a former board president. Sheldon, on the other hand, doesn’t see himself as an organization man. He looks down on bureaucracy of any kind. “I’m a lone wolf,” he says. “I just want to sing.”

But Sheldon sells himself short. He has been called the spirit of BCCO: always generous, friendly, encouraging, and ready with a smile. He and Nancy open their home for sectionals and small benefit concerts. And they’re always willing to write checks to support BCCO activities. “We have given with love, with feelings of interest and love.”

At BCCO fall retreats, Sheldon performs Frank Sinatra pieces—some of his favorites—in the UnTalent show. Remembering those times, he croons “You Make Me Feel So Young” and beams at his wife of nearly 55 years. Nancy, who says she was ignorant of popular music, recalls that Sheldon would sing to her in the car, asking her to guess who wrote the song. “I always knew I would marry an extraordinary man,” she says.

Sheldon writes poems for concert programs, too, “drivel and scribbling,” he says in his self-deprecating way. His favorite, for



German Requiem performed again last May, gives a glimpse into his love of the piece. It begins: “The sounds of peace/ Imbue your human mass. Soul-searing chord progressions are a lease/Through which we humbly pass.”

Sheldon, now 81, was nearing retirement from his practice as a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst when he joined BCCO in the spring of 2003. Despite being a bit of a loner, he is drawn to the camaraderie, the feeling of warmth that he gets from gathering together with a group of people who he believes represent a cross-section of quirky Berkeley. He loves the music itself and what he learns from the conductors—both from Arlene Sagan and from Ming Luke. Arlene used to call it a one-room schoolhouse, he says, because of the singers’ different levels of ability. Sheldon loves that inclusiveness.

Sheldon and Nancy, who’s a retired psychiatric nurse, keep busy in retirement with grandchildren. Among their four children are 10 grandchildren, several of whom are musically talented. Like so many retirees, Sheldon says he doesn’t know how he had time for his medical practice. “Now I’m trying to master music,” he says.

Asked if he has words of wisdom for his fellow chorus members, Sheldon gives an impish grin and says, “Sing out!” Just enjoy the music, he says. You can find Sheldon in the front row of the bass section and get a warm greeting and words of encouragement. In typical Sheldon fashion, downplaying his own “OK” voice, he says he always sits next to Sherman Rothman “because he has a perfect ear. I depend on him.”

PHOTO COURTESY OF RUTH WHITE

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an orchestra. We have a substantial waiting list, and our concerts are very well attended. (We even had to turn away some concertgoers at our last concert.) At the December concerts a generous patron pledged a matching donation of up to \$11,000 in concert donations. Our audience came through, and we were delighted to be able to take full advantage of this matching pledge.

As president of the Board, I can honestly say that I’ve never been part of a group more engaged, more conscientious, more open to everyone’s input and ideas. We’re close to finishing our first strategic plan, and we’re currently revamping some of our bylaws. We rely on the support and hard work of our Chorus Manager, Gabriela Crane. She’s always thinking of ways to improve our operations and she also—as a volunteer—designs and maintains our web site, refreshing it, creating new resources for our singers.

Ming is delightful, sharing with us his musicality, knowledge, energy, and enthusiasm. As part of his commitment to furthering

the education of young music professionals, he has brought on Derek Tam as Assistant Conductor. Derek has made himself part of the BCCO family—not only by fulfilling his responsibilities with impressive ability and good humor, but by helping out in myriad ways and sharing with us his outstanding harpsichord skills at the December concerts. We are ever happy to continue our long relationship with Debra Golata. She has been part of the BCCO family for many years, coaching us in vocal techniques and holding special sectionals that help us nail down the notes and dynamics.

As you may have gathered by now, BCCO is all about heart, goodwill, camaraderie, and love of music and community. Whether you’re an audience member, a donor, or a singer, you’re a critical part of our family. Please come to our concerts in May—and to our great dance fundraiser in March!

by Karen Davison, Board President

SPRING FUNDRAISER:

Zydeco Dance and Potluck

by Ruth White

Circle Saturday, March 24, on your calendar and shimmy on over to Haver Hall at Northbrae Community Church in Berkeley for an evening of Cajun and Creole music and Zydeco dancing. Our spring fundraiser will feature the celebrated all-women Bay Area band Creole Belles, founded by Delilah Lewis in 1995. Appearing with them will be Andrew Carrière, a native of Louisiana and a proud descendant of a long line of great Creole musicians.

Zydeco's roots go back over several centuries to Creole and Cajun music, with contributions from American folk genres. Zydeco first appeared in Louisiana in the late nineteenth century at house dances, where families and friends gathered to socialize. Our potluck fundraiser will continue this tradition by bringing together people of all ages—BCCO singers and supporters as well as members of the wider community—to share delicious food, great music, and kick-up-your-heels dancing.

To encourage those of us who might be a bit shy about getting on the dance floor, we've invited Cheryl McBride to teach some traditional Zydeco dance steps. Or you can make up your own! For a preview of the music, check out the Creole Belles at www.creolebelles.com/audio.htm. Please plan to come to the event, and bring your friends with you!



The Creole Belles, the Cajun and Creole dance band that will be performing at BCCO's spring fundraiser, on March 24 (www.creolebelles.com)

THE DATE:

Saturday, March 24

THE LOCATION:

Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda, Berkeley

THE TIME:

6 pm to 7:30 pm, optional potluck —bring food and wine to share
7:30 pm to 10:30 pm, dancing!

RESERVE TICKETS:

Adults \$25; Children over 6, \$12; Children under 6, free.

Tickets available only in advance. Reserve your tickets by calling Liz Raymer at 510-601-1718 or emailing her at lizzrd@mac.com. Directions at www.northbrae.org/directions.html. Haver Hall is wheelchair accessible.

BCCO Goes National with the Young Composer Competition

by Linda Morris

Thanks to a generous lead donation from Meyer Sound Laboratories, BCCO will sponsor a Young Composer Competition intended to encourage the next generation of choral composers and enrich the musical experience of our chorus and orchestra. Additional support is graciously being provided by the Grace Jones Richardson Trust, by Bennett Markel, and by an anonymous donor.

Composers born after May 1, 1972, will be invited to submit an original, previously unpublished, composition of up to eight minutes in length, written for a full chorus and a chamber orchestra. Three finalists will be chosen by a jury led by Music Director Ming Luke, and all three compositions will be performed and recorded in spring 2013. One of the three works will be selected as the winner of the competition, and it will be featured, and the composer honored, at our spring 2014 concert. There will

also be a monetary award for each finalist and for the winner of the competition.

BCCO has a tradition of performing original compositions, begun under Music Director Arlene Sagan. In the 1990s, the late Julian White, pianist and composer, wrote three pieces for BCCO. More recently, the chorus sponsored two choral competitions for Bay Area composers and subsequently performed the works of competition winners Jerry Mueller and Robin Eschner. Robin Eschner was later commissioned by BCCO to write a piece in tribute to Arlene Sagan at the time of her retirement.

BCCO is proud to sponsor the Young Composer Competition and continue our tradition of commissioning original choral music. For more information, go to Young Composer Competition on our web site, www.bcco.org.

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CZECH LATIN

by Linda Morris

Most people know there are “classical” Latin and “vulgar” Latin, but did you know there are language-specific pronunciations as well? Two years ago, BCCO performed Brahms’s *Requiem* using German Latin pronunciation, and last season we sang Vivaldi’s *Gloria* in Italian Latin.

In May, BCCO will be performing Dvořák’s *Requiem* in Czech Latin—which means we’ll be pronouncing the Latin with a Czech accent. According to Music Director Ming Luke, “It’s very traditional to perform Latin with the composer’s native accent, whether French, German, or Italian. It would be great fun to perform a requiem or a mass from a Texas composer in a Texas accent! Or why not an Italian New York accent?”

Quarter Notes is the newsletter of the Berkeley Community Chorus & Orchestra (BCCO), a community arts group that presents free concerts of great choral music. Information at (510) 433-9599 or www.bcco.org.

NEWSLETTER DESIGN BY KRIS KARGO

Antonín Leopold Dvořák
Requiem Mass, op. 89
One of the great unknown treasures
of the 19th-century
choral repertoire

**DVOŘÁK
REQUIEM**

Carrie Hennessey, *soprano*
Cybele Gouverneur, *mezzo-soprano*
J. Raymond Meyers, *tenor*
Richard Mix, *bass*

Saturday, May 5, 8:00 pm
Sunday, May 6, 4:30 pm
Sunday, May 13, 4:30 pm

St. Joseph the Worker Church
1640 Addison Street, Berkeley
wheelchair accessible

Free Concerts
donations appreciated
suggested donation \$5-\$20
more information at www.bcco.org

BERKELEY COMMUNITY CHORUS & ORCHESTRA
MING LUKE, MUSIC DIRECTOR