

quarter notes

SPRING 2014

NOTES FROM THE BOARD:

As the board of directors began making plans for BCCO's 50th anniversary (to be celebrated in 2015-16), we knew we wanted to look to our future as well as celebrate our past. Although the board is broadly representative of the chorus as a whole, with all its members drawn from the chorus's ranks, it was important for us to hear directly from other chorus members about their sense of BCCO's direction. So we decided to hold a series of small discussion sections, all focusing on the same five questions, to be led by current and former board members. Our music director, Ming Luke, believed the project important enough to dedicate two rehearsal hours to the discussions. We called the project "Going Forward," and we divided the chorus randomly into fourteen groups.

The rehearsal rooms fairly buzzed with excitement as we gathered in our groups the first night. Every group focused on five simple but crucial questions about members' likes, dislikes, and wishes for the future; volunteerism; and our engagement with the larger community. We were delighted that almost three-fourths of the chorus participated. They spoke up, listened to each other, engaged fully with the questions. We hadn't anticipated how much chorus members would appreciate being asked to join in such give and take with each other. A number of members asked that we do something of this sort each year, and the board shares that determination.

The most popular question was what chorus members liked about BCCO. Singers expressed appreciation for the high musical standards that Ming sets for the chorus—and for his being willing to move beyond safe, comfortable repertoire to take on more difficult music usually reserved for professional choruses. They were enthusiastic about the improved musical quality of our performances and of the orchestra under Ming's direction. Many singers were enthusiastic about our recent Central *continued on page 2*

NOTES FROM MING:

MENDELSSOHN'S ELIJAH

This semester the Berkeley Community Chorus & Orchestra tackles one of the greatest oratorios in the symphonic choral literature: Mendelssohn's grand and sublime *Elijah*. Over two hours in performance, and with the chorus the focus for the majority of the work, *Elijah*, one of Mendelssohn's last works, is a feat for any chorus. Indeed, there are over twenty individual choruses for the ensemble from start to end.

Like Brahms, Mendelssohn was a classicist living in the romantic era. With Bach and Handel as his inspirations, Mendelssohn envisioned a grand oratorio that would bring to life various scenes of the Old Testament prophet Elijah. What resulted was a hybrid between the drama of an opera and the history of the Bible. Mendelssohn felt strongly about the subject material, having been born into a Jewish family, and the intensity and directness of *Elijah's* writing makes for a powerful work. The first performance featured no fewer than eight encores, and it was one of the biggest triumphs of Mendelssohn's career.

"No work of mine went so admirably the first time of execution, or was received with such enthusiasm by both the musicians and the audience," he wrote. A reviewer reported: "The last note of *Elijah* was drowned in a long-continued unanimous volley of plaudits, vociferous and deafening. . . . Mendelssohn . . . descended from his position on the conductor's rostrum; but he was compelled to appear again, amidst renewed cheers and

huzzas. Never was there a more complete triumph; never a more thorough and speedy recognition of a great work of art."

The chorus has spent much time not only bringing the notes and rhythms to life, but also bringing the colors and the story itself to life.

Come join us for this wonderful work! —Ming Luke

SPRING CONCERT SERIES:

JUNE 13, Friday, 8:00 pm

JUNE 14, Saturday, 4:30 pm

JUNE 15, Sunday, 4:30 pm

A full house at Northbrae Community Church gave a standing ovation to the new Berkeley Women's Community Chorus (BWCC) at its first concert, "Sing, 'Tis Glorious Spring," on April 6, 2014.

The 50-member chorus, under the direction of the talented and energetic Debra Golata, performed an eclectic sampler of music from Renaissance to jazz. With its international flavor, the concert introduced the audience to a traditional Japanese folk song, a Hebrew love song, and a Navajo prayer. Works by Bach, Handel, and Mendelssohn showcased the group's mastery of classical works, and the program also included modern standards like "Stormy Weather." Vocal soloists merged with the chorus to produce a sweet and resonant sound, with accompaniment during different pieces by violin, piano, or percussion.

Golata was thrilled at how quickly the ensemble came together, considering that the group held its first rehearsal in January. "I didn't do this alone," says Golata. "Jacqueline Anderson was a great help as assistant conductor, and the women in the chorus worked very hard." *continued on page 3*



Accompanist Heather Pinkham and Ming
PHOTO: RUTH WHITE

NEW WOMEN'S CHORUS SPARKLES AT DEBUT CONCERT

DEREK TAM, A YOUNG MAN ON THE MOVE

In 2011, when newly hired music director Ming Luke suggested that bcco hire an assistant conductor for the chorus, we had no idea what that position would entail. But of course we said yes.

And so we met Derek Tam, a recent Yale graduate, tenor, and conductor of small ensembles, who bravely stood in front of over 200 singers, most two or three times his age, as we watched him learn to conduct a large group.

bcco members have had the joy of watching Derek soar as a conductor as he has gained confidence, improved his skills, and found his own style of communicating with the chorus. His natural sense of humor and optimism imbue his conducting, making him a delight to sing with.

In Derek's words: "I've really appreciated the energy and warmth of the chorus members, and have had a great time learning under Ming's mentorship."

The results have been stunning. We quickly learned that Derek was no shy flower but rather a musical entrepreneur who, in the past two and a half years, not only spent his time with bcco but also managed to found his own baroque trio, *Alchemy*; co-found a small baroque ensemble, *MUSA*; lead a children's chorus; and perform as a singer and keyboardist.

His energy did not stop there. Derek became the conductor of bcco's Berkeley Community Chamber Singers, led Sunday sectionals, and with bcco's help, began and conducted a mixed chorus at Berkeley High School, a group that brought down the house at bcco's spring 2013 concert.

Derek will complete his tenure with us this spring by conducting part of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* at Hertz Hall, and he will continue in his new post as the music director of First Congregational Church in Berkeley.

Keep your eyes on this young man. He has just begun. Derek, we will miss you.

—Li-hsia Wang and Pam Miller



PHOTO: AMA TORRANCE



PHOTO: RUTH WHITE

WELCOME TO NEW BOARD MEMBER MELISSA MILLER

The year was 1988—the headlines trumpeted names like Dukakis and Quayle, words like Reagan, AIDS, Bhutto chosen in Pakistan—and Eugene Jones, bcco's founder, was stepping down as music director, while Arlene Sagan was beginning her first year with the chorus.

Though few current bcco members were around to witness this transition, Melissa Miller, our newest board member was. She became

a member of the board of directors that year and helped bcco make its first major transition.

According to Melissa: "I remember how different the chorus felt. Arlene was a strong woman with a style very different from Eugene's. We knew we were in for some excitement, and we were not disappointed."

bcco is thrilled to have Melissa, with her long organizational memory, join the board as we start planning our 50th anniversary.

Born in Iowa, Melissa went to Minnesota for college and graduated with a degree in social work from the University of Chicago, but California beckoned. Since 1972 she has worked in public social services, primarily in the development and enforcement of quality standards in care facilities for the State of California.

Fortunately for bcco, Melissa retired a few years ago and can now bring her very strong management and administrative skills to the bcco board.

Besides being a baker, cook, gardener, reader, and traveler, she finds time to volunteer, working with a small local agency serving homeless women and their children.

Melissa's warm smile and hearty laugh are well known to choristers, as a member of the committee that provides treats at weekly rehearsals. As she says, she has developed an intimate knowledge of the chorus's collective snack preferences—something sure to prove useful during her tenure on the board! —Pam Miller and Ruth White

NOTES FROM THE BOARD, continued

European tour, wanting comparable tours to be an ongoing part of our chorus experience. At the same time, people expressed regret that not everyone could afford to go. Chorus members love the strong sense of community we have within bcco, and in almost every group they spontaneously expressed support for our basic mission: to remain a non-auditioned chorus that sings masterworks of choral music.

Chorus members also identified changes they would like to see, even knowing that some of them are impossible to achieve right now; still, they don't want to give up on the principles behind them. They wished for more age and racial diversity in the membership. They wished there were a larger venue in Berkeley so that all chorus members could perform in every concert, instead of having one-third of the singers sit out each performance. They asked for even more music education for the chorus—workshops in rhythm, vocal technique, sight reading, and the like.

A variety of outreach efforts received enthusiastic support, including bcco's helping to start a women's chorus under the able direction of Debra Golata; our national composer competitions; our conductor mentoring program, which brought us Derek Tam as assistant conductor for three years and Mary Dougherty as conducting apprentice this year; and our support for choral music at Berkeley High School. Still, some members rightly cautioned that we not spread ourselves too thin.

In short, we all learned a great deal from the Going Forward discussions, but I think the dominant impression is that we are a vital community, committed to our basic musical mission and proud to be part of a thriving chorus. Not many community choruses make it to fifty years; we have two previous conductors, Eugene Jones and Arlene Sagan, to thank for their vision and their musical leadership. We also have the chorus community as a whole to thank for its ongoing enthusiasm and belief in the organization and each other.

—Linda Morris, Board President

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.

DESIGN: KRIS KARGO

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SPRING FLING'S GREAT SUCCESS

Not too many events can happily encompass folks from ages 4 to 90, but that is exactly what happened at the Line-Dancing Extravaganza and Raffle sponsored by BCCO on March 15. Over 80 people dined and rocked out at Northbrae Church under the excellent direction of Aimee Haire, our exuberant and very patient dance instructor.

As is usual with BCCO events, the potluck was terrific; the drinks were plentiful, thanks to our generous sponsors Damas Vineyards and Trader Joe's; and the bartenders—Tom Clark and Sheila Singleton—were charming.

BOOK REVIEW

Imperfect Harmony: Finding Happiness Singing with Others

by Stacy Horn, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2013
284 pp., paperback \$15.95

Stacy Horn writes of singing choral music as one who has found an activity that brings to life a sense of belonging, of being in harmony—with oneself, one's fellow singers, and the world. Singing in a large, amateur chorus, she speaks knowingly of the joy that comes through the hard work of learning and interpreting great choral music from all ages, all composers. Her particular experience is of singing with the Choral Society of Grace Church in New York City, but as I read her book I felt, with nearly every page, that she could have been reporting on the experience of singing with the Berkeley Community Chorus & Orchestra.

Imperfect Harmony is organized into long chapters focused on experiences related to major choral works (for example, Brahms's *Requiem*) interspersed with shorter sections discussing various historically important developments in choral singing. Horn brings a wealth of historical information both to support the value of the various choral works being performed and to illustrate how choral singing has grown and taken important roles in Western culture. A number of major composers and their large choral works are brought into the discussion: Brahms, Verdi, Handel, Mozart (of course), Tomás Luis de Victoria, Randall Thompson, Ralph Vaughn Williams. Horn also discusses works by more recent and possibly less-well-known composers (or at least less well known to non-singers!) such as Franz Biebl (*Ave Maria*) or Morten Lauridsen (*O Magnum Mysterium*).

Many of the discussions focus on people's desire for participatory music. Horn talks about the trials of being a "not great" singer learning complex choral music, but she also emphasizes the joy that comes from those moments when

The new raffle generated lots of excitement. Generous gift certificates from Bay Wolf, the Cheese Board, Chez Panisse, Comal, Marzano, Revival, and Rivoli allowed us to sell over 800 tickets.

Many thanks to our hard-working committee chairs, Betty Pigford and Ruth White, who were generously assisted by primary helpers Ann Hurley, Marie-Ann Hill, and Kitty Hughes. Jarred Miyamoto-Mills was our talented emcee for the evening. This was clearly a community effort, with ten additional chorus members contributing

one's individual voice suddenly comes into complete harmony with all the others. She writes of her disappointment at being "demoted" to soprano 2 for one piece, and then, "only a minute later, my mood and my world changed. I hit my first correct soprano 2 note. . . . It was a D. The soprano 1 to my right was singing the B flat above me. I love that glorious high B flat and should have been apoplectic with envy about not getting to sing it myself, but instead I was pinned to that D, vibrating with a wondrous musical rapport I'd never felt before. I was feeling harmony. Not just singing it, but physically feeling it. . . . It was a rush. . . . Two notes and I went from a state of complete misery and lonesomeness to such an astonishing sense of communion it was like I'd never sung with the choir before."

The value—the necessity—of having a conductor who can bring out the best in each singer and thus of the whole ensemble is emphasized. The conductor must also be able to inform singers of the history, the context, and the meaning of the music at hand so that they can not only generate technical excellence but also bring their souls into harmony with the spirit of the music—and thus enable those hearing the music to participate as well.

Reading this book at a time when I wasn't singing every week served as a reminder of how wonderful it is to sing in chorus, of how fortunate I am—we all are—to be able to sing with each other, with a wonderful conductor, in BCCO. It made me look forward eagerly to the time when "the amateur chorus . . . gets you out of the house every week to do something that is like exercising joy."

—Betsy Littell

their many skills to make the event successful. BCCO tenor Nikki Gage was one of Aimee's assistants and helped make the dance instruction easier to follow.

Not only was the event great fun, but we raised over \$5,200! —Pam Miller



Line-dancing partygoers PHOTO: CHRISTIAN FRITZ

WOMEN'S CHORUS DEBUT, *continued*

Golata has a deep musical background that includes singing with the acclaimed Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra Chorale, concertizing in the U.S. and Mexico, and a master's degree in choral conducting. She is beloved by the BCCO community for her skilled vocal coaching.

Eight months ago, BWCC was just an idea formed by a few BCCO members as a way to open up more choral opportunities for the many women on BCCO's waiting list. With the wholehearted support of BCCO's board of directors, Golata was given the go-ahead to form a new chorus, choose the repertoire, and perform the first concert.

Kudos to the chorus members, Golata, and all who worked to make this chorus a reality. 'Tis definitely a glorious spring.

Those interested in registering for the fall semester—"Holly-Holy-Days," featuring Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*, Holst's *Rig Veda*, and other seasonal repertoire—can go to <http://bcco.org/womens-chorus> for more information, or email Deb Golata at dgolata@yahoo.com. Rehearsals are held at Northbrae Community Church, in Berkeley, on Thursday nights, from 7 to 9 pm. Registration for the fall is currently open, and Deb recommends that you register by July 1 to assure that your music will arrive on time. The first fall rehearsal is on August 28; registration closes on September 4.

—Pam Miller

BCCO gratefully acknowledges the continued financial assistance of the City of Berkeley and the Alameda County Arts Commission ARTSFUND.

Join BCCO's 50th anniversary celebration during our 2015–16 season!

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A NEW COMPOSER COMPETITION

In February, BCCO launched its most recent composer competition, this time for emerging composers. Calls for submission were sent to over 800 email addresses across the country, including schools, music organizations, teachers, and individual composers. Amazingly, we received our first submission within a couple of days, although the deadline is May 30. (The call for submissions can be found at <http://bcco.org/ecc-call>.)

This is BCCO's fourth composer competition. The first two were initiated by our former music director Arlene Sagan, and won by Bay Area composers Jerry Mueller and Robin Eschner. Last year, under Ming Luke's direction, BCCO sponsored the Young Composer Competition, and for the first time the competition had a national scope. The winner was Michael Schachter, for his poignant *Oseh Shalom Bimromav*. The current competition is for emerging composers of any age.

Applicants are asked to submit examples of previously composed work for our panel of judges to review. The judges will narrow the field to a few finalists, and the chorus will participate in selecting the winner, who will be commissioned to write a 5–10 minute symphonic choral work for premiere in our fall 2015 concert series. The winner will receive a cash award of \$7,500; recordings of the performed piece; and two trips to the Bay Area, to work with the chorus at a rehearsal and then to come back for the series of concerts.

BCCO is proud to encourage emerging composers and provide a forum for their recognition.
—Karen Davison

HERTZ HALL is on the UC Berkeley campus, near Bancroft and College. Parking & transit info: www.calperformances.org/visit/venues/hh.php

HERTZ HALL, UC Berkeley campus
Ming Luke, Music Director
Carrie Hennessey, *soprano*
Megan Berti, *mezzo-soprano*
Brian Thorsett, *tenor*
James R. Demler, *baritone*
opus 70, an oratorio by
FELIX MENDELSSOHN
Elijah
FREE!
JUNE 13 Friday, 8:00 PM
JUNE 14 Saturday, 4:30 PM
JUNE 15 Sunday, 4:30 PM

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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HIGHLIGHTS IN THIS ISSUE:

- **IN HERTZ HALL WITH ELIJAH**
- **GOING FORWARD INTO OUR 50TH YEAR**
- **EMERGING COMPOSER COMPETITION**
- **WOMEN'S CHORUS DEBUT**

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