

The Harmonium Inchoirer

Choral Society

Harmonium Celebrates 25th Anniversary!

by Anne Matlack

Harmonium Choral Society celebrated its 25th anniversary at its Spring concert. The concert, *Cantare del Cantare*, included an arrangement of *How Can I Keep from Singing* by Marjorie Herman, Harmonium's founding director. Marjorie, her husband Buzz, and Al Kopacka, who preceeded Anne Matlack, attended the Sunday performance. Birthday cake and a display of memorabilia were enjoyed at the reception which honored founding members who are still singing with the group: Dorothee Burchartz, Jeri Herbert, David Hoadley, Dot Stearns, and Joan Tracy (accompanist).

Of course, the centerpiece of the celebration was the world premiere of the 25th anniversary commission *There Is No Age* by Minnesota composer Edie Hill, to words by Harmonium bass and poet Jabez Van Cleef. Van Cleef based his text on conversations with Harmonium members about the meaning of singing in their lives. Hill enjoyed Harmonium so much, she went on tour to Italy and heard the European premiere as well!



Jabez Van Cleef and Edie Hill at June's premiere of "There Is No Age."

PHOTO BY BETH BRANIGAN, JUNE 2005



Harmonium Choral Society Directors since founding. (L to R) Israel "Buzz" Herman (1982-1983) and Marjorie Herman (D. Mus.), 1979-1983, Anne Matlack (D.M.A.), 1987-present, Al Kopacka, 1983-1987, PHOTO BY BETH BRANIGAN, JUNE 2005

Student Composers at 8th Annual Contest

by Jonathan Reale

Harmonium's Eighth Annual High School Composition Contest, "Singing," culminated with the performance of **Dale Trumbore's** *Sing to the Lord* at our 2005 Spring Concerts. Ms. Trumbore of Chatham was a Runner-Up in the 2004 contest; this year, she took the Grand Prize of \$500 with her unique yet approachable psalm setting. Other hopefuls from across the state employed an assortment of traditional, jazz, and avant-garde techniques in their efforts. **Emily Clader** of Cranford was designated Runner-Up for her peaceful treatment of Joyce Kilmer's *The Singing Girl*, and Honorable Mentions went to two students from Summit, **Daniel Rufolo** and **Erik Youngdahl**.

In addition to some of our fine contest judges from prior years, Harmonium was honored to have **Edie Hill**, composer, and **Jason Tramm**, conductor, join our 2005 judges' panel. Ms. Hill is a Minneapolis-based composer who by special commission provided Harmonium with the centerpiece work for our

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25th anniversary season, the blossoming *There Is No Age*. Mr. Tramm is Chorus Master of the New Jersey State Opera and a Mason Gross School of the Arts (Rutgers) doctoral candidate and Presidential Fellow in choral conducting.

Preparations for our ninth annual contest, "A Well of Memories" are already underway. Among this coming season's contest features, made possible through the support of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, are expanded personal and over-the-phone tutoring sessions in choral writing as well as a doubling of the Grand Prize cash award to \$1000. Harmonium hopes these added enticements to entrants will make the 2006 contest our most "memorable" yet!



High School Student Choral Composition Contest winners, not including Honorable Mentions, (L to R) Dale Trumbore, Grand Prize Winner, Senior, Chatham High School; Emily Clader, First Runner-Up, Senior, Cranford High School; Johnathan Reale, Contest Coordinator.

PHOTO BY BETH BRANIGAN, JUNE 2005

Next year's Student Composition Contest theme is: **A Well of Memories.**

Please tell your friends, teachers and composition students! Registration will be due in December and manuscripts in February.

A Taste of Harmonium...

October Fundraiser

Harmonium's fall fund raiser, Saturday, October 1st, has blossomed into a series of intimate dinners (eight to ten people) hosted by several Harmonium members in their lovely area homes. For \$25 (paid to the host) you can be wined and dined in an intimate atmosphere with other lovers of choral music, after which all the parties will join up at Grace Episcopal Church in Madison for dessert, coffee, displays, prizes, and music. You can also join the party at Grace Church for dessert only (\$10).

Learn more about Harmonium, meet interesting folks, and support our programs by calling today for a reservation (space is limited). Please call 973-538-6969 or visit the Harmonium website at www.harmonium.org. We are also happy to receive donations of prizes or underwriting of expenses.

Holiday Concerts Seek Wisdom

by Anne Matlack

Harmonium's December concerts, entitled *A Wreath of Wisdom*, will include the eclectic variety of styles audiences have come to expect, unified around the theme of "wisdom." Music includes English anthems by Boyce, Howells, Byrd, Bainton, Rutter, Cornelius, and Jonathan Dove, as well as American music by Stroepe, Jane Marshall, Hatfield, Lazar, and more, including a rousing gospel setting of "John the Revelator." Themes range from Revelations to Magi and Magae (including a setting of the words of Mother Teresa). The concerts will be held in the Gothic acoustic of the Church of the Redeemer in Morristown, December 10th at 8pm and December 11th at 3pm. Please see the subscription insert for ticket information.

The featured work will be another Harmonium-commissioned world premiere, "A Suite for Christmas" by **Michael Mendoza**, choral professor at The College of New Jersey, with words by Jabez Van Cleef, Harmonium bass, poet and librettist-in-residence. The work is accompanied by a chamber

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ensemble of harp, percussion, oboe/English horn and bassoon. The text explores how the Christmas Story serves to “make all things new.”

“If angels are the messengers, then what is the message?” says Van Cleef. “I think we are called to redress disparities in wealth and power, to find a source of healing in the most desperate destruction; to equate sincere and universal goodwill with lasting peace and the end of gratuitous killing, and to find in our communities a model which welcomes each person and in which there are no winners and losers, only souls clothed in the armor of light.”

Benedicite—A Wealth of Blessings for March concert

by Anne Matlack

For its March 4th and 5th, 2006 concerts, Harmonium will collaborate with the New Jersey Youth Chorus (Intermediates, grades 4–6) as the guest children’s choir in a full performance of British composer Andrew Carter’s cantata *Benedicite*. *Benedicite* was inspired by the new Benedictine carvings in the restored south transept vault of York Minster.

The text is the Canticle “Bless the Lord” freely arranged and added to. (Harmonium Halloween concert goers have heard one of the children’s movements “O Ye Badgers and Hedgehogs, Bless the Lord.”) The full cantata is in a challenging English cathedral style in the tradition of Britten and Rutter. A chamber ensemble orchestration with piano, harp, percussion and brass will be used.

The children’s chorus of 30, conducted by Noel Werner, will also present a portion of the concert with a praise-of-creation theme. Harmonium will also sing J.S. Bach’s *Lobe den Herrn*, to round out the praise theme. Please see the subscription insert for dates, times and ticket ordering info.

It’s Back

Every other year, families in the Madison area look forward to the *Halloween Concert*, featuring the Children’s Choirs from Grace Church, Madison, scary organ music by “Dr. Anne” Matlack (Bach’s *Tocatta in d minor*, a tradition!) and an appearance (costumed) by Harmonium’s Chamber Singers and Outreach Chorus. This year’s concert includes favorites *Mary Had a Little Lamb* (Lambscapes), *Spiderman*, and *Monster Mash* as well as some new surprises. Youthful Irish fiddle champion **Connor Leszczuk** will make another demonic appearance. Donation at the door is \$5 per family, and/or a non-perishable food item for a local food bank.



Warming up for a Halloween-themed concert at Oratory Church of St. Boniface in Brooklyn, NY, for the church’s 150th Anniversary Concert Series. October 31, 2004.

PHOTO BY BETH BRANIGAN

To Italy and Back....

Article and photos by Jabez Van Cleef

At the beginning of the summer, about half of Harmonium's membership began preparations for our tour of Italy, attending a demanding series of rehearsals at Grace Church in Madison. The group, which numbered about 45, included a sizable contingent of youth members who had either sung with Harmonium during the 2004–2005 season or were returning from college to sing with us on this trip. When our repertoire was prepared, we held a free concert at Grace Church, then went home to pack.

The first leg of our itinerary took us through Frankfurt to Milan, where we boarded a bus and drove to Stresa on Lake Maggiore, in the foothills of the Alps. The tourbooks are somewhat dismissive of Stresa for its "faded grandeur," but most of us found this resort to be vividly colorful and extremely beautiful. Our anticipation for singing was greatly enhanced by the sight of posters advertising us in every part of town.

Stresa and Lago Maggiore

On our first full day in Stresa many members of the chorus went on a boat ride to three islands just off the shore. The first island, Isola Bella, is the site of

a magnificent villa belonging to the Borromeo family. Under the vast dome of the drawing room in the villa, we were permitted to sing a few songs and create a true sense of enchantment for the other tourists at the site.

Our first official performance was at the following Sunday morning mass in the church of a nearby town called Baveno. The congregation was impressed enough with us to applaud spontaneously, and we responded to them with some additional songs before we left to go back to Stresa.

On the evening of that day we performed a full-fledged concert at Stresa's primary church, next door to the hotel. Because the Roman Catholic church imposes restrictions on performance of secular music in churches, we were only able to sing the religious part of our program. Consequently, many in the audience were disappointed to discover, at what they thought was intermission, that the concert was over. We had already found that municipal authorities in Italy tend to discourage public singing by groups like ours, as it is thought to violate the property rights of composers. However, before our trip was over, we found some opportunities to perform in public areas, as we had in the villa on Isola Bella.



Harmonium's "Youth Corps" prepares for a boat ride to the islands off Stresa, in the Italian area of Lago Maggiore.

Orta San Giulio and Turin

In fact, one such opportunity came the very next day when we took a side trip to another resort town, Orta San Giulio. The town is nestled by the shore of a tiny lake with an island in the middle. From the town square people rent little boats and row out to the island, either to visit the church there or walk a narrow lane that encircles a famous monastery in the middle. Also from the square of the town, people climb a steep street and an even steeper stone path to visit a series of miniature churches which contain scenes from the life of St. Francis of Assisi. After a circuit of these monuments, we fetched music from our bus and sang an impromptu concert in a pavilion by the piazza. Unfortunately, a sudden thunderstorm drove many of our listeners to cover in the doorways around the square, but they seemed greatly to appreciate our efforts.

Next we transferred to Turin, home of Italy's automobile industry. From the city center, we traveled by bus to Rosta, a typical Piedmontese mountain town. There in the town's main church we met an Italian chorus and several relatives of Harmonium alto, Val Davia. Together with the local chorus we put on an extremely festive concert for a very appreciative standing-room crowd. Since the rule about secular music in church was less stringently enforced here, we were able to perform our European premiere of Edie Hill's new piece, *There Is No Age*. (Full disclosure: I wrote the words.)

I personally found this concert to be the high point of my tour because of the unembarrassed emotion of the crowd when they heard us. When we sang *Every Night When The Sun Goes Down* (with a heartfelt solo by former Harmonium bass Adam Aguanno), I watched a woman in the third row of the church continually cover her face with her hands to wipe away streams of tears. She wasn't the only one. After the concert was over we had a lovely reception in a room behind the church where we were all able (inarticulately, in different languages) to tell each other how much we loved meeting and singing together.

On to Milano

The next day we bussed to Milan. On the way there we visited Pavia, home of an ancient university (a famous graduate was Christopher Columbus) and



Harmonium arrives in church's piazza, to perform later for a standing-room only audience in Rosta.

site of a very tall brick tower in the Piazza Leonardo Da Vinci. We also stopped and toured a beautiful monastery called Certosa. The guide, a monk who had actually lived in New Jersey, extended permission for us to sing part of our Hassler mass in the sumptuous sanctuary of the monastery chapel.

From Certosa we drove on to Milan, the cultural center of northern Italy. Many chorus members attended a performance of *La Cenerentola* ("Cinderella") at the world's most famous opera house, La Scala. The next day we bussed to Lecco, a city on the southern end of Lake Como, where we were to perform at the main church as part of their annual music festival. The church had a beautiful "live" acoustic that suited us well. And, at the last moment, the church authorities allowed us to perform Edie's piece one more time, delighting a more reserved but equally approving audience.

At Milan we engaged in a moveable feast of museums, shopping, and street entertainment, leading on Sunday evening to our appearance in the Duomo as the official choir for an evening mass. Those of us who had attended the mass in the cathedral that morning were delighted to discover that there was a much better attendance later in the day, with more

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than 500 people hearing us sing in the vast and majestic acoustic of the cathedral.

After the mass the entire chorus gathered in a nearby restaurant where we celebrated our trip and sang some of our favorites. A little girl (perhaps four years old) appeared from a nearby room in the restaurant, found Anne, and asked her (in English) if we could please sing another song. We launched *Ride the Chariot* as this perfectly beautiful child stood dumbfounded before us, torn between fear and delight, all the way to the end, with her eyes big and round as saucers. Somehow this poignant moment struck me as the perfect ending to our visit in such a beautiful place.

Outreach Ranges Far & Wide

One of the things that makes Harmonium Choral Society unique is its ability to present outreach programs for a variety of circumstances, from a Morris County nursing home in the sleepy month of August, to Halloween concerts at a local library or a Brooklyn church. As well as the aforementioned, this past year members entertained SCEEP (Suburban Cultural Education Enrichment Program) students in Morristown, provided music for services at Grace Church Madison and Morristown Unitarian Fellowship, and presented our third annual curriculum-based Madrigal Assembly for Millburn 6th graders. Next year we will sing at a convocation for college and an assembly program for Far Hills Country Day School.

To book us for YOUR school, call the Arts Council at 973-285-5115; and for other events, call us at 973-538-6969.

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Harmonium at Merkin Concert Hall

by Anne Matlack

In addition to its own subscription series in the 2005–2006 season, Harmonium Choral Society will be collaborating with other groups in two exciting events. In the first, Harmonium will join Antioch Vocal Ensemble in the world premiere of *The Mystic Trumpeter* by **Alan Seidler**, a choral symphony based on Whitman's text. The concert will take place Tuesday evening, January 17, 2006, in Lincoln Center's Merkin Concert Hall, conducted by Joel Thome. The vocal soloists are Laura Last, soprano; and Steven Goldstein baritone. The instrumentation calls for solo trumpet, brass ensemble, four percussionists, piano, organ, eight celli, and four double basses.

Seidler is an eclectic composer, who has rather a cult following around his work in the Blues and Ragtime revival of the 1970s, but is also a serious composer. "Basically, I've had two teachers," says Alan, "Vincent Persichetti and Giampaolo Bracali (a longtime faculty member at the Manhattan School of Music). They both taught me that even the most intricate of musical creations begins with making the commitment to putting just one note on a piece of score paper, and above all, the important discipline of writing every day."

In November 1995 a full program of Seidler's concert works was presented at New York's Merkin Concert Hall. This January's event will include some *a cappella* choral works presented by Harmonium (Anne Matlack directing) and Antioch (Joshua Copeland, director) as well as other chamber works, and culminating in the premiere of *The Mystic Trumpeter*. The eleven exceptional musicians that make up Antioch debuted at the gala opening of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in 1997, and quickly emerged as one of the New York metropolitan area's finest vocal ensembles. In recent seasons, critics have called Antioch "stellar," "flawless," and "an exceptional group."

"We are excited to be collaborating with Antioch as well as premiering a major work on the New York concert scene," says Harmonium's Artistic Director,

Anne Matlack, "the sound of the group is amazing, and will bring us to a whole new level of performance."

More information can be found at:

www.alanseidler.com and www.antiochonline.com.

Mozart's *Requiem* May, 2006

by Anne Matlack

Colonial Symphony's new Artistic Director, Paul Hostetter, has invited Harmonium to be the guest chorus in its Saturday, May 6, 2006 performance of Mozart's requiem.



But in true Harmonium spirit, this isn't your mother's Mozart! "I've convinced Paul to do the exciting new realization by Robert Levin," said Anne Matlack, Harmonium's Artistic Director. "As most people know, Mozart died before completing the requiem, and the version most often done today was completed by his student Süssmayr. This edition combines scholarly meticulousness and the utmost musicianship to create a less-flawed finished product, truer to the spirit of Mozart. In this 250th anniversary of his death, we are thrilled to join Colonial Symphony for this performance which is sure to be exciting."

Harmonium

Choral Society

SAVE THE DATE!!

A Taste of Harmonium

Saturday, October 1, 2005

Please see page 2 for details.

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