

cantemusnews

Cantemus Chamber Chorus Semiannual Newsletter

Vol. 5 / No. 1 • March 2003



CANTEMUS
Small Chorus. Grand Sound.

**Cantemus
Chamber Chorus**

Sopranos

Claire Cayot
Katy Fickenwirth
Donna Gale
Anne Maguire
Shea Mavros
Pamela Morris
Susan Nash
Michele O'Connor
Suzie Reine
Bettina Turner

Altos

Katya Bakulina
Debra Basile
Pat Lowery Collins
Elizabeth Lebel
Priscilla March
Dorothy Monnelly
Janet Pletcher
Marcia Siegel
Debby Twining
Nancy Weinberg

Tenors

Chris Barker
Jamie Cabot
Nicolas Fiszman
Gary Freeman
Gary Lubarsky
Chuck Mullen
Mark Pierce
Kevin Rich

Basses

Richard Blumenscheid
Bob Chase
Michael Fosburg
Bill Gelwick
Todd Herrmann
Stephen Pletcher
Nat Pulsifer
Richard Salandrea
Conrad Willeman

Music Director
John Hoffacker

Accompanist
Robert Littlefield

Cantemus Chamber Chorus
P.O. Box 784
Ipswich, MA 01938

Toll free information
1-888-CHORUS-1

www.cantemus.org



*John Hoffacker,
Music Director*

Immortal Fire

by John Hoffacker, Music Director

Because you are reading this, you know already how well the arts illuminate what passes for reality. For centuries, musicians and poets have been inspired to illuminate life. In our Spring 2003 program, we perform some of the music inspired by this Immortal Fire.

We begin with Benjamin Britten's setting of "Hymn to St. Cecilia," a poem by W. H. Auden about the gift of music and the fire that burns within musicians.

To respond to life in a musical way was, for Auden, to be in touch with the Divine, to hear the divine muses. His poem listens to the muses, then reflects back their glory. The poem is impressionistic: it begins in a garden, a pastoral scene, where the power of the divine inspires in a blinding array.

The second stanza of Britten's music is a Mendelssohn-like "fairy scherzo," an attempt to capture the evanescence of life. The third stanza hearkens back to Henry Purcell's "Ode to Saint Cecilia" by using a Purcellian form known as a "ground," in which a repeated bassline supports variations above.

Britten wrote the piece on board a ship returning him to England in 1942. He'd gone to America when life in England became to him unbearable. Britten was a lifelong pacifist, and he left England when bombs started falling around him. So did Auden. Both were regarded as cowards, but they were also envied. Auden and Britten, homesick, both returned before hostilities ended. Britten composed his "Ceremony of Carols" on the same trip.

The next song on our program is "Cantique de Jean Racine," composed by Gabriel Fauré for a competition in his final year studying at the Conservatoire de Paris. The text comes from a collection of sacred poetry from the French classic period – an age the equivalent of Elizabethan poetry in England. Jean Racine was France's Shakespeare. The music expresses Fauré's customary restraint and command of dramatic structure.



Join Us for "Immortal Fire"

CANTEMUS CHAMBER CHORUS

*Eclectic and exquisite music by
Britten (Hymn to St. Cecilia), Ravel (Trois Chansons),
Copland (Old American Songs),
Bernstein (Chichester Psalms), and more.*

Saturday, May 10, 2003 8 p.m.

Central Congregational Church
Pleasant & Titcomb Streets, Newburyport

Sunday, May 11, 2003 4 p.m.

First Church – Congregational
Meetinghouse Green, Downtown Ipswich

The third set in our program is three "Chansons" (songs) by Maurice Ravel, composed at the height of the First World War. Ravel reacted to the horrors of that war by writing music extolling the glories of French culture. The French madrigal, called a chanson, used a very light texture and exquisitely balanced poetry, neither too light nor too heavy and often quite witty. Ravel composed the texts for these chansons himself.

The first is a pastorelle, describing the flight of sweet young Nicolette from all kinds of suitors – flight from all except an old but rich fellow who wins her hand in the end. The second song poignantly describes the loss felt by Ravel for his friends who have gone off to war, many never to return. The last song is the climax of the set, describing the terrors of monsters, dragons, sylphs, and an amazing list of other scary creatures. The music paints a delightful picture of what my son

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Massachusetts Cultural Council

Cantemus is funded in part by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency, and by grants from the Beverly, Ipswich, and Newburyport Cultural Councils, local agencies which are supported by the MCC.

What Is Cantemus?

Founded in 1982, Cantemus (Latin for "Let us sing") is a nonprofit organization composed of 37 voices from across the North Shore of Massachusetts. The group is dedicated to the performance of music composed for chamber chorus. Its repertoire ranges from medieval and Elizabethan to baroque, classical, romantic, and contemporary music from around the world.

Board of Directors 2002-2003

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Vice President

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Todd Herrmann
At Large

Priscilla March
At Large

Hugh McCall
Non-Singing

Deb Twining
At Large

John Hoffacker
Advisor

cantemusnews


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calls "funny scary," allowing all the singers to recite the list of creatures at breakneck speed, and finally to realize that the monsters have all been chased away by the old men in the park.

We close our first half with a set of Old American Songs collected by Aaron Copland and originally arranged by him for solo voice. Boston composer Irving Fine then transcribed Copland's solo songs for chorus. We sing five of them: "The Boatman's Dance," "Simple Gifts," "Long Time Ago," "I Bought Me a Cat," and the minstrel song "Ching-a-ring Chaw."

In the second half of our program we present *Chichester Psalms*, written by Leonard Bernstein in 1965 while on sabbatical from the New York Philharmonic. Bernstein combined a 1960s jazz idiom with contemporary classical orchestration to set several Hebrew psalms for choir (originally) of men and

boys, with boy soloist. The orchestra for which he wrote had no woodwind instruments, only brass, percussion, and strings. He arranged it later for organ, harp, and percussion – the orchestration we will use.

In the first movement, he asks the musicians to "boisterously" perform the line "Enter his gates with praise." The music casts inhibitions aside and sets the texts in an unabashed joyful and intimate awareness of connection with the Divine. The second movement is a sublime solo for boy alto and chorus, using the Hebrew text of Psalm 23. The concluding movement avoids the "big finish" found in splashier psalm settings, opting for a quiet, firm chorale setting of the text "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

We look forward to sharing with you the illumination of Immortal Fire. Please join us in May! 🎵

Two Decades of Grand Sound, Yet Still Family

by Donna Gale, Soprano

In honor of Cantemus' imminent 20th anniversary, we asked Donna Gale, a founding member and Board President for the chorus' entire first decade, to recollect the group's beginnings and milestones.

Cantemus was the brainchild of a very talented young man from Salem, Edward Lundergan, whom I met when we both were singing with the Paul Madore Chorale. He was at a crossroads in his music career, and we often talked about his dream to start a select chamber choir dedicated to exploring the literature written for the smaller chorus. I had been singing in choirs most of my life, and my most rewarding experience was singing in a chamber chorus in college. So, I offered to help him with the organization needed to turn the dream into a reality. We started by sending letters to everyone in the area that we thought might be interested in such a group. Over 50 letters went out inviting singers to audition and, from those that auditioned, we selected the first 12 members.

We operated on a shoestring budget. Our only income in the beginning was each member's \$100 dues, which covered Ed's salary as director and accompanist. The Unitarian Church in Danvers let us use their space for rehearsal, in exchange for providing music for two services per year. The first concert took place



Donna Gale

in the fall of 1983. We sang as part of an evening service at the church – mostly madrigals.

We were so small back then that if a few singers were absent, it was almost impossible to conduct a rehearsal. We were fragile and the lack of numbers made performing "iffy." Gradually the chorus grew to 16 singers and, by our second year, we won a grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Arts Council. During our second season ('84-'85), this money enabled us to hire an orchestra for our spring concert, which included Mozart's *Solemn Vespers*.

Ed left us at the end of our second year to study at the University of Michigan, telling me to keep Cantemus alive. Dr. Lundergan now teaches at the college level.



Robert Littlefield has accompanied Cantemus for 18 years.

Our director for the next two years was Robert Ruplenas. He hired Robert Littlefield, our accompanist, who has remained with us for the past 18 years. Robert Dean became the third director, and Michelle Montgomery followed as the fourth person to lead us.

(continued next page, column 2)

So Many Ways to Save on Cantemus Tickets!

If you think hearing the North Shore's virtuoso chamber chorus isn't enough of a treat, try out one of many ways to do so at a bargain price!

- Advance-priced tickets by mail (\$15 adults, \$10 seniors) are now available! (See page 4.)
- Advance-priced tickets are also available at our several ticket outlets: The Book Shop in Beverly Farms, Nazir's Fine Jewelry in Hamilton, Ipswich Shellfish Market, and Newburyport Printmaker in Newburyport.
- AAA: Show us your AAA card at the door, get 25% off the "door" price.
- Essex Preferred: Show us your Essex Preferred Card at the door, buy one ticket and get second ticket free.
- WGBH Membership Card: Get a \$20 ticket for \$18.
- Donor VIP Card: Call number on VIP card, then pick up your reserved discounted tickets at the door. 🎵



(continued from page 2)

Despite the challenges we experienced in the changes in musical direction, Cantemus stayed alive, our membership continued to grow, and we developed a following of loyal patrons.

Each time we needed to find a new director we employed an exhaustive audition process, including interviews and ratings completed by each choir member. In 1993, one candidate took our breath away. Dr. John Hoffacker auditioned and led us in a rehearsal. We had never seen such energy! This man was on fire! Some of us worried that we wouldn't be able to keep up with him. But we couldn't ignore the fact that he had an excellent ear, caught every mistake, and easily communicated what he wanted from us. We chose him to be our next director, and have enjoyed his outstanding musical leadership for the past 10 years.

Today Cantemus has grown to a maximum membership of 40 singers. But, as in the beginning, we are required to audition each year for admission into the group. The additional voices give us stability and the ability to perform more works. From the casual group we started as, we've grown to have an energetic and dedicated board of directors, and operate on a budget that far exceeds our humble beginnings. Our level of professionalism has grown considerably – we're a tightly run, more involved group, and we have earned a respected position in the music community.

But what has kept me singing in Cantemus for 20 years is that I love singing in a chamber choir. With a small-sized choir, you really depend on each other – in a big choir it sometimes doesn't matter if you're there. But this is more like family.

I think Dr. Lundergan would be proud of what we have become. 🎵



CANTEMUS
Small Chorus. Grand Sound.

Please make checks payable to **Cantemus** and mail this form to:

**P.O. Box 784
Ipswich, MA
01938**

Cantemus Order/Contribution Form

It's far from inexpensive to make quality choral performances available to the arts-loving community. Less than 40 percent of Cantemus' operating expenses are covered by the tickets we sell to our concerts. And, as the media has been reporting, grant funding for arts organizations in Massachusetts has suffered tremendously as a result of state revenue shortfalls. Grant funding cuts make contributions from our individual fans even more critical than in the past. Won't you please consider supporting Cantemus by making a tax-deductible contribution? We'll continue to do our part by making your Cantemus concert experiences unforgettable!

- I am enclosing my tax-deductible contribution of _____.
- Please add me (name/address written below) to the Cantemus mailing list.
- Please add my friend (name/address written below) to the Cantemus mailing list.
- I'm interested in sponsoring a performance of a specific work(s). Please describe: _____.
- I'd like to purchase ____ (number) of the Cantemus **"Joy Shall be Yours"** CD (\$15 per CD plus \$2.50 shipping per order).

Total amount enclosed: _____

Name: _____			
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City: _____	State: _____	Zip: _____	
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Family Concert Features Songs, Stories

As this issue goes to press, Cantemus was warming up for its second annual Free Family Concert on March 8 at First Parish Church in Beverly. Emceed by storyteller Tony Toledo, the concert will be sponsored in part by contributions from Garden City Pediatric Associates in Beverly, Beverly Cooperative Bank, and First Church in Wenham. We thank these organizations for their generous support. 🎵

Cantemus Tickets-by-Mail Now Available

We're always interested in making your Cantemus concert-going experience even more enjoyable. That's why advance-priced tickets to Cantemus' May concerts are now conveniently available by mail. Simply mail your ticket request with your check by May 7, 2003. Your requested tickets will be held for you at the door. Send your check and ticket request to Cantemus Tickets-by-Mail, c/o 5 Coombs Circle, Newburyport, MA 01950. Tickets-by-Mail are sold at the advance-priced rate of \$15 (adults) and \$10 (seniors). Students are admitted free. 🎵

Judging Set to Begin in Composition Competition

In recognition of its second successful decade of eclectic and adventurous singing, Cantemus is sponsoring a choral composition competition for students in New England colleges and universities. Judging of the numerous entries by a panel of three prominent Boston choral conductors is planned to take place in March.

"This competition is a direct outgrowth of Cantemus' educational mission," said John Hoffacker, music director. "We're excited to provide an outlet for promising young choral composers in our region."

The winner, who will receive a \$1,000 prize, will be announced in April and at Cantemus' "Immortal Fire" concerts in May. Cantemus plans to premiere the winning competition entry at an upcoming concert in continuing celebration of the chorus' 20th anniversary. 🎵

SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL!

We're pleased to have been invited to bring Cantemus' grand sound to Cambridge when we perform Dvořák's Mass in D as part of the invitation concert series at Christ Church in Cambridge.

Simply Beautiful! ***Choral Masterworks***

Dvořák *Mass in D*

**Plus works of Ravel, Britten,
and Copland**

Saturday, April 5, 2003

**Christ Church
Zero Garden Street, Cambridge, MA**

Don't want to drive? Take the T's Red Line to Harvard Station. The church is across from Cambridge Common.

Tickets available at the door.
(Suggested ticket donation is \$15 each,
\$20 for families,
\$5 for students and seniors.)