



ORATORIO SINGERS

WESTFIELD, NEW JERSEY

Background

Now entering its 31st year, Oratorio Singers is a chorus of 70-100 singers which performs major choral works by various composers. Under the direction of Mr. Trent Johnson, this community organization continues the high standards and tradition developed by the Rev. Philip R. Dietterich, who founded the chorus in 1980 and who was its director until 1994. It was in 1970 that, after forming both the chorus and orchestra in the Baroque style, Rev. Dietterich conducted the complete 1754 Foundling Hospital Version of "Messiah" with a standing room only audience in attendance. The huge success of this concert was to give rise ten years later to the formation of Oratorio Singers.

The reputation of the Oratorio Singers is widespread in the metropolitan area. Each year the goal is to select and perform one or more choral masterpieces which may be well known or those that are significant but not generally sung by most choral groups.

Repertoire

Past performances include the Passions, "Christmas Oratorio," the "Mass in B Minor," motets and other works of J. S. Bach, Brahms's "Requiem," Mendelssohn's "Elijah," Dvorak's "Requiem," "Belshazzar's Feast" by William Walton, and "Requiems" of Fauré, Mozart, and Verdi. Works of Handel include "Ode for St. Cecilia's Day" and the oratorios, "Judas Maccabaeus," "Israel in Egypt" and "Messiah." Other works include "The Creation" and "Mass in Time of War (Paukenmesse)" of Franz Joseph Haydn, the "Gloria" by Francis Poulenc, and the "Great C Minor Mass," K427, by W. A. Mozart which he scored for chorus, orchestra, soloists, and organ. Our 1998 concert was an encore performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's "St. John Passion."

Additional concerts included the "Chichester Psalms" of Leonard Bernstein, Verdi's "Four Sacred Pieces" and Dello Joio's "To St. Cecilia." In November, 1999, our only Fall presentation included four inspirational choral works: the "Te Deum Laudamus" of Franz Joseph Haydn, "Christmas Cantata" of Daniel Pinkham, "Jubilate Deo" of Giovanni Gabrieli, the "Gloria" of John Rutter, and Gabrieli Canzonas for brass and organ. This concert was a rousing success. Spring 2000 saw Oratorio Singers perform a relatively unknown work of Sir Edward Elgar, "The Music Makers," and the complete "Lobgesang" (Symphony #2 - Choral) of Felix Mendelssohn. The March 2001 concert was noteworthy since it consisted of four selections: two were world premieres and two were standard, but not usually performed works. Premiering works were Debussy's newly orchestrated "Ariettes Oubliées," (four songs for soprano and orchestra), and "The Paschal Lamb," - a choral cantata by Trent Johnson, for chorus, soprano, and orchestra. The world-reknowned soprano Phyllis Bryn Julson was the soloist. Also featured were Mozart's "Te Deum laudamus," and Zoltán Kodály's "Missa Brevis." Our 2006 concert featured the premiere of Trent Johnson's "Five Psalms for Soloists, Chorus and Orchestra."

We are privileged to have performed several times at Carnegie Hall (Mozart's Requiem in 2002 and 2003 and Verdi's Requiem in 1989).

Singers from all voice parts—soprano, alto, tenor, and bass—are invited to join the Oratorio Singers. There are no membership fees just the requirement that you contribute your time and energy towards our concert. And, you do not have to be a member of the Methodist Church or necessarily live in the Westfield area. We invite adults and youth of all faiths and backgrounds to this community chorus! High school or college students who can sing or singers who are currently studying or performing vocal or instrumental music are welcome. Scores will be available to purchase.

A love of music and an ability to sing (with a good musical ear), watch, and take direction, plus a commitment to a well-organized schedule of chorus and part rehearsals will help us make every concert the success to which our audiences are accustomed.



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Our Director

Trent Johnson, the music director of Oratorio Singers of Westfield, New Jersey, is also Organist and Music Minister at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Bernardsville, NJ. He is an organist, composer, pianist and conductor. As conductor of the Oratorio Singers, he has led this organization in much of the standard literature of Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Verdi, Dello Joio, Bernstein, Kodály, Poulenc and others, as well as three premières of his own works. He is a graduate of the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University and The Juilliard School. Major conducting influences have come from his work with Frederick Prausnitz, Dr. David A. Weadon and Norman Scribner of the Choral Arts Society of Washington DC. An active organ recitalist, Mr. Johnson frequently performs in the major churches of New York City, Washington DC, Boston and Northern New Jersey. In 2004, he was one of four American organists invited to participate in the Second International Organ Festival in Kyiv, Ukraine. Here, he played four organ recitals and gave a master class in composition. In 2005, the Peabody Institute invited him to give an organ master class and featured him in recital as both organist and composer. He also recorded the organ works of Pulitzer Prize winning composer George Walker for Albany Records. Other musical journeys have taken him to Germany, Holland, Belgium, England, France and Japan.

In 2006, he was an organist at Radio City Music Hall in New York City, where he played for the Christmas Spectacular Show. In January, 2007, The New York Theater Organ Society invited him to appear in recital on the “Mighty Wurlitzer” organ at the Music Hall.

As a composer, recent premières include “The New Colossus,” with the Westfield Symphony, the Oratorio Singers première of his “Five Psalms” for soloists, chorus and orchestra, and the première of his quintet at New York City’s Merkin Concert Hall, commissioned by the Cygnus Ensemble. In April, 2008, Mr. Johnson travelled to Kyiv, Ukraine, to participate in the Kyiv Music Festival. While there, he premièred 3 works: a viola concerto, a trumpet concerto and a new work for organ and string orchestra. Also in April, 2008, he premièred a new work for the Mixed Flock Orchestra Project in Maplewood, NJ. As a recording artist, Mr. Johnson can be heard on Summit Records, Albany Records and the Xtreme Label. Later this year Mr. Johnson will again be traveling to Kyiv and Donetsk, Ukraine, to participate in the International Organ Festival.

Recent compositions include his viola and trumpet concertos and Elegy for Chernobyl for organ and string orchestra, both of which premiered in April, 2008, in Kyiv, Ukraine, as part of the Kyiv Contemporary Music Festival. While in Kyiv, his concertos were recorded by the Kiev Camerata conducted by Valery Matiukhin for a later CD release.

Mr. Johnson is the recipient of grants from Meet The Composer, funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, and is the 2004 recipient of the Wladimir and Rhoda Lakond Award in composition from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York City.

Truly a teaching director, under his leadership the Oratorio Singers has grown and developed into a top-notch performing group.

Many thanks to John R. Panosh for writing this material.