



Edited by: B.T. Sculac Stern

May 2015

*Come join us for our upcoming concert:*

### **Poems, Letters, and Premieres**

*Major Works by Dellaira, Effinger, and Whitacre for chorus and winds on poetry of Joyce, Dickinson, Rilke, and stirring letters of Van Gogh*

***One night only!***

Thursday, May 28, 2015 at 8 p.m.

*Saint Ignatius of Antioch Episcopal Church*

554 West End Avenue (at 87th Street)

**[Learn More](#) or [Purchase your tickets now!](#)**

**Concert Notes from our Music Director**

**2015 Benefit "Swing with NAS"**

**Get to know our members: Couples of NAS - Volume One**

**The Art and Science of Singing**

**Concert Notes from our Music Director**



*By: Clara Longstreth*

New Amsterdam Singers will sing choral music of great variety in the season's final concert at St. Ignatius of Antioch Church on Thursday, May 28 at 8 p.m. And yet along with variety come connections: three pieces in French, several works in which the oboe is equal partner to the chorus, and plenty of thought-provoking poetry in English and French.



Emily Dickinson is the program's best-known poet. Michael Dellaira has woven together four of her poems in "Nobody" for chorus and oboe. Dellaira's work owes a lot to folk music, in that the harmonic language is simple, and some to jazz, in that the rhythms are sophisticated,

syncopated, and fun to sing. NAS will be singing the New York City premiere of this piece. In his notes Dellaira writes, "*The chorus is our window into humanity. Like Dickinson, the oboe is the keen observer, answering questions we didn't realize we had asked.*"

The other piece for chorus and oboe is an older, much performed work by Cecil Effinger, a composer with a major name in his home state of Colorado, but who will be unfamiliar to our audience. His "Four Pastorales" sets evocative, enigmatic poetry by a fellow Coloradan, Thomas Hornsby Ferrill. His themes are folk heroes, noon heat in the middle prairie, and strange encounters in a dark wood.

Ben Moore is both composer and painter, and has long revered Vincent Van Gogh. His "Dear Theo" is based on selected passages from the letters Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo, who was his supporter and confidante during a troubled life. The letters show the passion for his art, his humility and compassion, his despair and hope. Moore has an uncanny ability to find harmonic language that reflects the painter's eye for color. The private words of a complicated artist set by a sympathetic composer result in a deeply moving a cappella work.

Our program also offers music of charm and humor: Poulenc writing childhood scenes (a good little girl, a sick boy, a lost dog, and a hedgehog), Bernstein writing jaunty tunes for the stage work, "The Lark," and Matt Harris writing a samba for men's voices in the form of a drinking song - pure fun.

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## 2015 Benefit "Swing with NAS"

By: *Rebecca Dee*

Missed the Saturday dance? I can sympathize. Don't get around much anymore myself these days. Still, if you couldn't make it out to the swanky "Swing with NAS" benefit last month, you missed a special night.

The Saturday dance in question was March 28, at Swing 46, a charmingly



Photo courtesy of Hannah Kerwin

intimate supper club in Hell's Kitchen. Dennis Goodenough manned the door, checking the guest list with a twinkle in his eye. A barmaid with rolled bangs and roses in her hair passed out drinks from an open bar, while elegantly-dressed revelers of various stripes - mainly choristers with their dates, or family and friends - milled about the cocktail lounge, or admired the offerings on display

at the silent auction at the front of the house.

The silent auction was a fundraising effort painstakingly coordinated by Amy Harrison, Auction Chair and NAS Board Member. The items on offer were donations collected by choir members, sometimes individual contributions, sometimes a collaborative effort by each of the four sections. Auction lots ran the gamut from tour tickets to voice classes to wine to handcrafted items to books and instruments for children.

An archway to the back of the lounge opened up to the dinner theatre, with diners nestled cheek by jowl at narrow tables, in tiered levels around the dance floor and a brightly lit stage. Left of center stood Timatha Kasten, a platinum blonde in Lamborghini red. She and her aptly named Total Knockout Orchestra performed jazz standards and Latin dance music as the dance floor slowly filled - first the particularly brave or the particularly graceful, then the rest of us who couldn't keep our feet still.

Dinner arrived in tasteful courses, and those assembled had a chance to enjoy the vocal stylings of some familiar faces, as Barbara Zucker-Pinchoff, Kate Leahy, and Rick Bonsall took turns fronting the Total Knockout Orchestra. They were each a delight.

Reports in the weeks since indicate that "Swing with NAS" was a fundraising success. It was certainly a successful night of music, food and fun with friends. Thanks to the organizers - Amy Harrison, John Duncan, Brian Farrell, and Dennis Goodenough - for making it happen.

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### **Get to know our members: Couples of NAS - Volume One**



*NAS is filled with wonderful and interesting individuals... and couples! In this issue of Grace Notes, we feature two couples who enrich NAS with their love of choral music and love for each other.*

#### **Rafael Yuste and Stephanie Golob**

Bass/Baritone Rafael and alto Stephanie married in 1993. The couple moved from Hoboken NJ to Morningside Heights when Rafa was first hired at Columbia, and joined NAS together in the spring of 1996. The previous summer, the couple attended a Summer Sing at CAMI Hall and that is where they first were introduced to Clara. After moving to the UWS, they discovered NAS rehearsed around the corner from their first apartment, on 113th and Broadway. Both Stephanie and Rafa were thrilled when admitted into NAS, and have been active ever since, even after the birth of their first child Rebecca in 1997. The couple enjoyed all the extra gigs as well - at Tanglewood, Carnegie Hall, and even Giants Stadium for the WNET Three Tenors benefit. Stephanie was also a Board member for a while. Eventually, with a new baby and two tenure-track jobs, the couple 'retired' from NAS. Their second daughter, Clara, was born in 2003. Clearly NAS was never far from their hearts.

Happily for NAS, the couple was coaxed out of retirement to sing the 40th Anniversary benefit.

Those of us lucky to know our esteemed conductor Clara, have experienced her compassion for her singers. In this case, balancing family life with choir. The couple sings one concert per year; Rafa in December, and Stephanie in May. The couple is grateful for Clara's flexibility and her generosity, and to everyone at NAS for always welcoming them back.

### **John Pinegar and Leila Sesmero**

John and Leila have been singing together ever since they first met on Christmas Eve, 1998. She is from Paris, France, and John grew up a couple of hours south of Paris, Idaho, in Salt Lake City, Utah. Once in New York, the couple sang in the Juilliard Choral Union. After a while, Leila was looking for a change in direction which was when Leah Kaplan, a friend and former member of NAS, told her about the chorus. Leila auditioned for NAS in the Spring of 2002, and immediately started singing in the alto section. John auditioned for the NAS tenor section the following September. With the exception of only a few concerts, the couple have been singing together in NAS ever since - they can hardly imagine that this is their 13th season.

Leila spends her days training dogs and their owners, and taking care of their own two mongrels as well as many others during the course of the week. John plays at being an Architect, just like Howard Roark in 'The Fountainhead'. They sing as an avocation, but are glad for their day jobs. He's tall and she's short. He's red and she's blue. He speaks Portuguese, Spanish and Cantonese, while she does pretty well with English and Hebrew to go along with the French and Spanish of her youth, though she can't seem to get him to speak French! Leila's classical music foundation in piano playing makes Bach scores easy for her. She has gradually developed a liking for new work by American Composers. John tries to memorize his music before each concert, and is usually successful; he finds it satisfying to only have to watch the conductor. John has served on the NAS Board in the past, and Leila periodically assists the choir in French pronunciation. They enjoy their associations in the choir, and have made some good friends here.

*Thanks to Leila and Stephanie for contributing to these articles!*

### **The Art and Science of Singing**

*While many of us associate music as an art form, those of use with a scientific bent enjoy delving into the science that makes this art-form transcendental.*

#### **Music structure determines heart rate variability of singers**

by B. Vickhoff et. al. [Front. Psychol., 09 July 2013] is available here:  
<http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00334/full>

#### **Abstract:**

Choir singing is known to promote wellbeing. One reason for this may be that singing demands a slower than normal respiration, which may in turn affect heart activity. Coupling of heart rate variability (HRV) to respiration is called Respiratory sinus arrhythmia (RSA). This coupling has a subjective as well as a biologically soothing effect, and it is beneficial for cardiovascular function. RSA is seen to be more marked during slow-paced breathing and at lower respiration rates (0.1 Hz and below). In this study, we investigate how singing, which is a form of guided breathing, affects HRV and RSA. The study comprises a group of healthy 18 year olds of mixed gender. The

subjects are asked to; (1) hum a single tone and breathe whenever they need to; (2) sing a hymn with free, unguided breathing; and (3) sing a slow mantra and breathe solely between phrases. Heart rate (HR) is measured continuously during the study. The study design makes it possible to compare above three levels of song structure. In a separate case study, we examine five individuals performing singing tasks (1-3). We collect data with more advanced equipment, simultaneously recording HR, respiration, skin conductance and finger temperature. We show how song structure, respiration and HR are connected. Unison singing of regular song structures makes the hearts of the singers accelerate and decelerate simultaneously. Implications concerning the effect on wellbeing and health are discussed as well as the question how this inner entrainment may affect perception and behavior.

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