



Grace Notes

Newsletter of New Amsterdam Singers

Edited by: B.T. Sculac Stern

May 2014

Join us for our upcoming Concert:

Full Fathom Five: Shakespeare in Song

Thursday, May 22, 2014 at 8 p.m.

Saint Ignatius of Antioch Episcopal Church
552 West End Avenue at 87th Street

[Buy your tickets Now!](#)

Shakespeare in Song

Reflections of NAS

NAS Singer Profile - Nina Reiniger

See Our Friends - The Melodia Women's Choir

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Shakespeare in Song

by: Clara Longstreth, Music Director

When deciding what to include in a program of Shakespeare settings, one faces an embarrassment of riches. The repertoire of choral music on Shakespeare texts is huge. For our May program we have chosen four cycles of a cappella settings. In all, there are 15 individual songs in these sets, and yet only one text appears more than once. That is Full Fathom Five, heard three times in our program, and the title of the concert.

One of the composers, Jaako Mäntyjärvi, describes the place of that song in Shakespeare's *Tempest* as follows: "a comforting yet ghoulish description of how the body of a drowned man is transformed into treasures of the sea and how mermaids ring funeral bells for him." The visual images are so clear, the words so evocative, that any composer will surely want to use some kind of "word painting" in his music. So it is interesting to see how each composer evokes an underwater scene with sea nymphs, bells, coral, and pearls.

Ralph Vaughan Williams achieves a shimmering, watery effect by dividing sopranos



into four parts, and he blurs the sound by close dissonance, with the strongest dissonance coming, not surprisingly, on the word "strange." He also blurs the rhythm by writing several passages of "cross rhythm," with duplets in one part and triplets in another.



Frank Martin also divides the chorus into many parts. His harmony has an unearthly beauty; he uses consonant triads, but juxtaposes them in unconventional ways. Both composers evoke the deep sea aspect of the text by often giving basses the melody. The Finnish composer Mäntyjärvi has a different approach. He does not use divisi passages, but achieves his under water effect with augmented chords and cross relations, which register to our ear as "strange." All three composers have bell-like effects for singers.

This program also includes a variety of styles, from Berlioz's dreamy, romantic vision of Ophelia, to a jazz influenced version of O Mistress Mine, to a sailor chantey for men's voices on a Tempest text, to a lovely barbershop quartet style piece. The glory of Shakespeare's words has inspired a concert of rich and strangely appealing music!

Reflections of NAS



by Max Blum

"Talented, devoted, eccentric, intellectual, welcoming, and fun." These are some words I use to describe the New Amsterdam Singers to outsiders. The phrase "eclectic taste" tends to come out, too. *The New York Times* has described our performances as "lively," "rich," "appealing," "quirky," "spirited," and "finely polished." And to me, these adjectives capture not only the voice of the choir, but our collective personalities.

I joined NAS as soon as I moved to New York, and our first rehearsals left immediate impressions on me. First, this was a group of singers who liked to enjoy themselves while they worked. I'd never before encountered an ensemble that made a weekly routine of putting together an elaborate feast for the break in rehearsal-- much less drinking beer during rehearsal! (Did you know that? The Chamber Singers drink at rehearsal. It's fantastic.)

But more than that, I found that my Tuesdays and Wednesdays became rich with fascinating people. The variety of personalities in the group matched the variety of music we were singing. Some singers, I learned, worked in mainstream professions, some in medicine of various kinds, many in academia, some in publishing, and there were many who had jumped between careers multiple times.

With such a meeting of minds, it shouldn't have been a surprise to discover that this was also a choir that gave voice to some very strong opinions among its singers, and in which it was often acceptable to debate—out loud, in the middle of rehearsal—anything, from pronunciation to added-in rests, and even conducting technique. Clearly, I wasn't

in Connecticut anymore.

Then there was Clara, anchored on Central Park West, with her lovely, sprawling apartment. That was where I met her for the first time, and where I ended up spending a lot of time during that first year. That Clara hosts choir members at her home so regularly, and even holds rehearsals there as a matter of course, seems indicative to me of her relationship with NAS. Many music directors relish the one-way power dynamic they have with their ensembles, and they keep their musicians at a distance. Not Clara. She has deep respect for every member of the choir, and I believe she sees her role as simply to guide us to our highest level of performance. She brings that out in performances that are compelling, polished, and nuanced; but she achieves it through leadership that is direct, pragmatic, and humble. And that's just right.

Now nearly three concert seasons have passed. Singers have come and gone, and I've performed with NAS in quite a lot of concerts, warm-up concerts, caroling nights, a cabaret, and even a run-out concert at the White House. I've made new friends in the choir, and gotten to know outside friends better by encouraging them to join NAS. I've learned a lot about what goes into a good rehearsal. I've consumed more than my fair share of glögg, and it's also probably good that I never drove to Chamber rehearsals. I'm so grateful for these experiences, which will always be tied together with my memory of these years starting out in New York.

But on top of that, I'm grateful for the lessons I've learned in NAS: Listen to your singers. Have high expectations, but relax if things don't go as planned. Program repertoire outside everyone's comfort zone. Enjoy yourself in front of the choir. Be yourself in front of the choir. And sometimes, if a note is flat, all you have to do is say so.

NAS Singer Profile - Nina Reiniger

by Jaime Leifer

Nina, you've quickly established yourself as an integral part of the NAS leadership. Tell us about some of the interesting projects you've taken on since you joined the group.

The project that was the most fun so far was organizing the NAS Revue last fall. I co-produced the show with Mike Milton. It was a great event that showcased some of the great NAS talent in a very different venue! My role was to choose the judges, organize dates for the auditions and shows, work with the judges to compile a final list of performers and their pieces, work with our accompanist, Paul Greenwood, to select the performance order and, best of all, I performed as part of a close harmony quartet. It really was a blast! It was a great group of people to work with and the audience seemed to enjoy it as much as the performers did. In addition to this Revue, I have been the event coordinator for two NAS Cabaret Benefits (2013 and 2014), coordinator of CD sales of our concerts and I serve on the NAS board.

And—as I well know, since you got me to join—you've been a star recruiter of new singers! How many people have you recruited?

I've never decided to recruit anyone - I guess I just talk about NAS to my friends and family and my enthusiasm is evident. Elspeth Strang is my uncle's colleague who heard about NAS from him. Alyssa LaFosse and I are friends from Paris Health Club - our kids are just two months apart! And, as you know, you and I know each other from our days in the women's chorus at Harvard, the Radcliffe Choral Society. So I guess my total is three for now!



You grew up and went to university in Canada, right? Any difference in the way Canadians do choral music?

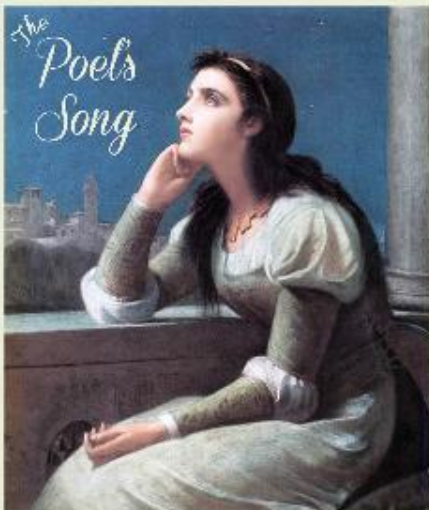
I think the way the university system is structured in the US, with most students living on campus, lends itself to having many choral groups. I went to Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, where nearly everyone lived off campus. There were some extracurricular activities and clubs, but since people left campus when their classes were done, the wide array of choral options didn't exist. I did belong to a small choir there, but it was not auditioned and not even held every year so the quality was lacking.*

You've also got a young son. Has he been bitten by the music bug?

Until he was two and a half, he used to declare "Luca does not sing. Luca does not dance." Unlike nearly every other kid I met, he wouldn't sing along and he would never sing to himself. I remember the day he danced for the first time - I got a video, I was so happy! Now he sings all the time and strangely enough for his age (four), he loves listening to vocal music. His favorite song is Lollipop Lollipop by the Chordettes - go figure! My Revue quartet practiced at my house last fall and he is still asking if they can come again and sing for him!

* Editors note: Variation in university choral music exists in Canada as it does in the US; the editor's alma mater had several auditioned choirs

See Our Friends - The Melodia Women's Choir



The Melodia Women's Choir

performing

THE POET'S SONG

May 3rd: **Holy Apostles** at 7:30pm
296 9th Ave, New York, NY, 10001

May 4th: **DiMenna Center for Classical Music** at 4pm
450 W 37th St, New York, NY, 10018

Use offer code 'NASDIS' at <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/profile/5998>

for a group or 40% discount!



A concert by **Melodia Women's Choir**

Saturday, May 3, 2014 at 7:30 pm
Holy Apostles, Chelsea

Sunday, May 4, 2014 at 4 pm
DiMenna Center for Classical Music, Hell's Kitchen

Follow NAS using social media!

Do you follow NAS on Twitter? Have you liked us on Facebook? We hope so, but if you haven't, take a moment to do so now! We'll be sharing more on social media about our May concert.

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/NewAmsterdamSingers>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/nasingers>



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