

SILENT AUCTION &
VERDI REQUIEM SINGALONG

The public is invited! Takes place on Saturday, August 2, 2003 at 10:30 a.m., Lakeside Presbyterian Church, Eucalyptus & 19th Ave. See page 8 for a partial list of auction items.

Choral Society to open arts festival in October

World premiere by Miya Masaoka

This fall, San Francisco's acclaimed Yerba Buena Center for the Arts will celebrate the tenth anniversary of its Wattis Artist-in-Residence program. In a month-long arts festival, the Bay Area's leading venue for adventurous art will mount a spectacular multidisciplinary series of presentations featuring musicians, visual artists, filmmakers, and performance artists. The San Francisco Choral Society has been invited to join the festivities.

On October 10 and 11, singers from the Choral Society will participate in the gala performance event that inaugurates the festival. On the program is the world premiere of *While I Was Walking, I Heard a Sound . . .*, a choral work by composer Miya Masaoka, who was commissioned by the Gerbode Foundation to write a piece for the occasion. Masaoka brings together an ensemble of nine vocalists and 150 voices in three choirs to create a spectacular sonic experience. The Choral Society will be joined by the San Francisco Chamber Singers and members of the Piedmont Children's Choirs. Sharing the program will be a line-up of other performance artists, including poets and dancers.

The new piece is a cappella, but instead of singing a text the performers will articulate phonemes — vowel and consonant sounds made with the lips and mouth. The nine-member group of "quasi-soloists," whom Masaoka calls a "sound color ensemble," will employ what she describes as "extended vocal technique." In addition, the composer

will use "spacialization," in which singers located in the back and side balconies will contribute to the sonic ambience. The piece is neither tonal nor melodic but will pass through "implied tonalities," says Masaoka. Performing this unique piece of music promises to be a fascinating and very challenging experience for the Choral Society.

Miya Masaoka is an internationally recognized performance and sound artist who has created works for koto, laser interfaces, laptop, and video and written scores for ensembles, chamber orchestras, and mixed choirs. In her performance pieces she has investigated



the sound and movement of insects and the physiological responses of plants, the human brain, and her own body. Her works have been performed at

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Verdi's Midlife Requiem

Giuseppe Verdi completed his *Requiem Mass* in March 1873. From his letters we know he felt that with this composition he had become a serious composer: "I am no longer a clown serving the audience, beating a huge drum and shouting, 'Come on! Come on! Set up!'" he writes, a remarkable statement given that he was already the extremely successful composer of at least 25 operas.

Nor did Verdi want his *Requiem* to be premiered in an opera house or a concert hall and thus be reduced to a mere performance. He insisted on a major church, and the *Mass* was finally presented in May 1874 in Milan's San Marco Cathedral for an invited audience of Italian and foreign dignitaries.

Verdi himself conducted this

premiere performance and another one three days later at La Scala. The *Requiem* was a huge success and was soon being performed in opera houses, churches, and concert halls throughout Europe and America. It was so popular, in fact, that to Verdi's horror it was even given in a sports arena in the Italian town of Ferrara, accompanied by a band!

Verdi composed his *Requiem Mass* with more than usual care. Uncharacteristically, he sequestered himself in his suite at the Hotel de Bade in Paris, refusing to hear any music or go to the theater until most of the writing was done. Once the soloists were chosen, he coached them himself. He knew that the work's length of one and three-quarter hours, together with its musical

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From the Executive Director



A snapshot in time

When I sat down to write this column, I was surprised how little leapt to mind in the way of interesting tidbits of information that would keep readers captivated and enthralled. Now, I do write quite regularly, I did work as a journalist early in my career, and I know what it is like to feel “blocked.” But this felt different. So I pondered and pondered. Thought and thought.

I didn’t want to go down the path of so many executive directors who write this kind of column, which invariably turns into “what we need to do next to be successful.” It usually translates into “we’re not doing enough now, so let’s pick it up, shall we?”

Should I invoke our illustrious past? Bring up the “good old days,” as many of our long-term singers do when things get bumpy? Or should I look to the future, when the economy becomes “perfect,” the living easy, and my financial worries about the San Francisco Choral Society will be few?

But being a Capricorn and quite used to taking things one step at a time, I decided I would just settle into where we are right now: this moment – good, bad, or indifferent – warts and all. So let’s take a look at our own snapshot in time.

You don’t need me to tell you the economy is funky, costs are up, arts organizations aren’t receiving the usual funding, contributions are down, Bush is president, and God knows what that means (just give your new tax refund to the Choral Society, and I’ll take care of it properly, damn it!).

Am I concerned by all of this? Absolutely. Does it paralyze me while making decisions for our group? Most of the time, no. And I do make a fair number of decisions for this organization. There are more than 200 of you singing in the Verdi *Requiem*, and I am certainly concerned with how you feel about the state of the organization, but I would rather you concentrate on how

well you are singing. Or, on how much you enjoy learning the music. Or, on whether this is a fun way to spend your Tuesday evenings.

Our snapshot at the moment is crystal clear at the center, although a little fuzzy around the edges. As of July 2003, we are an arts organization that is a beautiful picture of many singers, young and old, from all walks of life, coming together to create wonderful music. We work hard together to make our own personal memories. We accomplish difficult tasks in rehearsals and we learn, through outstanding music teachers, the intricacies of making notes on a page come to life. We have joy in making music at a time when joy isn’t easy to achieve. We enjoy friendships and camaraderie. We are a community within a community. We have a great deal of fun, and we try to be as good as we can be. That is a pretty nice picture.

Where does it get fuzzy? It’s the finances, of course. Will that change anytime soon? Will we ever become a crystal-clear picture without flaws? No one knows. Hard decisions will continue to be made. Compromises are part of this business, and we will have to compromise. Cash flow will continue to give some of us headaches and a few sleepless nights – nothing new there.

But none of the uncertainties take away from where we are today. So enjoy the Verdi. Embrace the Davies Hall experience. Participate in the Silent Auction. And continue to sing. Meet the people next to you, and enjoy the relationships that you can forge. You have all come together for one very specific reason – the music. Enjoy the moment. Take the opportunity to learn a difficult piece and to accomplish that goal with many others. Take pride in your achievement, and nurture the growth of your musical knowledge. Enjoy the music!

Now, have I given you any keen insight into the inner workings of the

organization or enlightened you with any chestnuts of wisdom? I doubt it. What I hope I have passed along is how important it is to be a part of something that gives you and others joy. This moment, this organization’s moment, is a picture that is not yet fully developed but that is becoming sharper and clearer as each trial and triumph comes our way. We contribute to our community, we educate, we satisfy a need, we bring people together, and we create beauty.

Besides, we all know there is no such thing as a perfect picture. The joy lies in striving to create one.

— Alan Kleinschmidt

From the Development Director

It’s an exciting year for the San Francisco Choral Society, with upcoming performances of the Verdi *Requiem* at Davies Symphony Hall, the Faure *Requiem* at St. Ignatius Church, and our annual Festival of Carols at the First Unitarian Universalist Church. Taking part in these musical masterpieces will be a great experience for singers and audiences alike. But we need some help to make these concerts successful financially as well as artistically. Your participation in these upcoming fun events will help the Choral Society stay financially secure.

Silent Auction Extravaganza, August 2. Discover delightful gifts or even a special self-indulgence: unusual red wines, intriguing white wines, delicious dinners, kitchen gifts, entertainment experiences, and more. Come at 10:30 A.M. and join the Choral Society in a Verdi *Requiem* singalong. Then bid at our silent auction and help support the Choral Society!

Live Art Auction, August 24. Come and bring your friends and invite members of our audience to buy extraordinary, original art by well-known artists. Choose from etchings, prints, and paintings that you will love to own. The auction will take place at the beautiful Gas Light Building in San Francisco. The Masterworks Fine Art Institute will conduct the live auction. Twenty-five percent of all auction proceeds will benefit the Choral Society, and that same percentage of any purchase you make is tax deductible. For more information check out website, www.sfchoral.org, or call 415/566-8425. Please RSVP to artauction@sfchoral.org.

Have you considered joining the Board?

You can tell, ours is a hardworking, fun-loving board. We take responsibility for the governance, financial health, and overall well-being of the chorus. As a member of the San Francisco Choral Society Board of Directors, you will personally influence and shape the future of choral music in the Bay Area. If you're interested in board membership, or if you'd like to know more about what's involved, please contact Gale Townsley: pres@sfchoral.org or (415) 677-5663. (By the way, did you know that board meetings are always open to singers who wish to attend? Check our website for meeting dates, www.sfchoral.org.) **JOIN US!**

Producers' Circle. This past May, we had a delightful party at Katie Knopoff's home for members of the Producers Circle, who are fronting the money for our performances of the Verdi *Requiem* at Davies Symphony Hall in August. A heartfelt *thank you* to all our generous supporters in the Producers Circle! If you missed the event but would still like to join the Circle, please call Alan Kleinschmidt at 415/221-5590. Forms are also available on our website and at rehearsal.

Reprise of the Bucket Brigade. Did you know that the Choral Society is coming up on its 15th anniversary? Time flies when you are having fun! In past years we have raised much-needed funds with a playful and wacky "Bucket Brigade." This year Sam Aranda, the Development Committee chair, is the Master of the Buckets. Please throw your spare change into one of his buckets as it makes its way through your section at rehearsals, and watch your pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters add up to big dollars for this special fund. Yes, we accept paper money too! Our goal is to raise \$15,000 by December 31, 2004.

eSCRIP. You can really make a difference for the Choral Society by registering for your shopping with eScrip. Here's how it works: Every time you make a purchase with your Safeway Club Card or a Visa or Master Card credit card, the San Francisco Choral Society gets a donation based on a percentage of the amount of your purchase. It's easy to register at www.sfchoral.org. Click on the eScrip logo, then the sign-up tab. Fill in the chorus's name, and you're set. We'd like to increase our eScrip enrollment by 25 percent this semester, so sign up now! Then whenever you shop, you will be helping the Choral Society. It's a win-win proposition.

— Joanne Kelly



Welcome to the third issue of our chorus newsletter! Congratulations to George Teekell for christening our newsletter with its new name. A huge thank you to editors O'Brien Young and Roger Fong, and to all of the contributors for their generous gifts of time, thoughtfulness, and talent to make this publication a reality.

While I am saying thank you, look around you next time you sit in rehearsal or stand on the stage for performance. Each of us experiences the joy and thrill of making choral music together because a dedicated group of volunteers among us takes on the many tasks that go into running this organization. And the efforts of that group of volunteers would be useless without our superb staff that performs their magic, concert season after concert season.

Please take the time to personally thank our singers who go above and beyond: Emily de Falla and Amy Markowitz for herding us into position onstage; our section leaders who keep track of places we aren't getting right; Ian Crane for his rehearsal and program notes (and our new recruit this summer, Jeanette Atherton); Nona Baker for her several years of contributions to program ads and design; Roger Fong for our terrific website; the "Biebl Boys" for singing for our musical supper; Tracy Schmidt and those whom she trained to make solicitations for in-kind donations for our silent auction; and Sandy Pastermack for picking up the mantle to bring us those great chorus hats and shirts. These are just a few.

Next time you read through a program, take note of all of our wonderful donors, producers, and advertisers. Make a point of saying thank you. Remember to patronize our advertisers and recommend them to your friends and family.

Without the generous support of

our donors, producers, and advertisers, we could not afford to hire our brilliant artistic director and assistant conductor, our impresario executive director, or our always reliable administrative staff. We could not perform at Davies Symphony Hall, St. Ignatius, Calvary Presbyterian, or Mission Dolores. (Verdi's *Requiem* on a sandlot just wouldn't be the same.) We could not hire better and better soloists or orchestras that make us shine when we perform and inspire us to make ever more beautiful music for our audiences.

As you leave each concert, be sure to remember to thank the members of the audience for attending, whether they are your friends or strangers you have never met. Tell them how much you enjoyed singing for them and that you hope they will come again.

Please also take the time to thank each of our hardworking and fun-loving board members. Give some extra applause to our Events Committee chair extraordinaire, Annette Dawson, for all those great white- elephant sales, silent auctions, sing-alongs, and this year's newly added art auction; our new Development Committee chair Sam Aranda for bringing us our remarkable Pac Bell Park gigs; our board secretary Wendy Heumann who protects our nonprofit status by keeping track of what we do; and Katie Knopoff whom we count on to keep those concert announcements coming and who is the go-to person whenever I need help.

Most of all, on behalf of our audiences into whose lives we deliver passion, beauty, anguish, art, pain, ecstasy, reconciliation, peace, and the divine, *thank you* for singing!

— Gale A. Townsley

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Meet our summer music students

Have you introduced yourself to the students who have joined us to sing the Verdi *Requiem*? We asked them to provide a brief biography, and to help you recognize them, they agreed to pose for a group picture at a very reasonable rate – chocolate treats!

As you will see, some of the students are former members of the Piedmont Children's Choirs (conducted by our own Robert Geary) and have also sung with the Choral Society before. The others have come to us through the Education and Outreach Committee (Wendy Heumann, Judy Pace, Jeanette Atherton, and Carol Talbeck), who contacted several Bay Area high school music teachers for nominees.

These are our current or just graduated high schoolers:

Michelle An, *alto*, sang throughout her years at George Washington High School. She will enter San Francisco State University this fall as a journalism major. At State she plans to continue vocal music studies by joining the women's choir. She has by far the coolest e-mail address, which begins with "iced_raindrops."

Leanne Davis, *soprano*, just graduated from George Washington High School. She has been singing since her 4th-grade choir days, and she added dancing in high school. While in the cast of "Sweet Charity," she hit a high B-flat, prompting her vocal instructor to invite her into both the award-winning women's vocal ensemble and the show choir. Her latest show was "Little Shop of Horrors."

Grahme Deasy, *tenor*, now a high school junior, has been singing and playing saxophone for as long as he can remember. He attends Deerfield Academy, a co-ed, boarding, college prep school in Massachusetts. There he sings in the chorus, a cappella club, and the all-male cappella group. Grahme is also a debater, varsity wrestler, the JV wrestling captain,

DJ of his show on the school radio station, a lacrosse player, tech support member, and blood donor, to name a few. Currently he's working at the San Francisco Education Fund through the program Coro Youth Fellows in Exploring Leadership.

Kevin Fugaro, *tenor*, attends San Francisco's University High School, where he sings in the chorus and plays first-chair alto sax in the jazz combo. He has sung and danced in many musical productions, most recently "Crazy for You." Currently studying voice with Michael Matson, he plans a career in musical theater and drama.

Juan Grattan, *tenor*, is a student at San Dominican School where he takes violin and piano lessons at their music conservatory. He plans to earn a degree in musicology after high school graduation this coming year. His favorite era of music is the 19th century. In the best spirit of a Romantic, he says, "Music is my life, and without music I would feel that I wasn't making the most of the precious gift of life here on Planet Earth. I believe singing is the affirmation of life."

Cristina Li, *soprano*, attends George Washington High School, where she just completed her sophomore year. Her passion is singing: "It helps relieve stress, and it makes me feel so much better." She has sung in school choir for the past two years, and next fall she will move up to Chamber Choir. The fun and challenge she had this year while singing in All City Honors Choir inspired her to join her school's Show Choir for her upcoming junior year.

Music students who are now in college:

Jessica Ashman, *soprano*, was in the Piedmont Choirs for twelve years, and she now serves as Conductor's Assistant for Girls' Intermediate, one of the younger levels. She has taken a year off from college to pursue music projects, such as *Sub Pontio Pilato*, a

modern opera. She plans to return to college this fall to continue her major in music.

Richard Cecil Fessler, *tenor*, attends UC Berkeley, where he sings in the chamber and university choirs and is considering a dual major in music and economics. His music career began with eight years in the Piedmont Children's Choirs. He has sung four concerts with the Choral Society.

Debra Gilkerson, *soprano*, majors in civil and environmental engineering at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania. She sang with the Piedmont Choirs from 4th through 12th grades. This year she traveled with her college choir to Finland, Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia, and Austria. This is her third summer with the Choral Society.

Jessica Inwood, *soprano*, is now a junior at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, majoring in art history. She remains unabashedly in love with the arts and says, "I decided to continue singing through the summer because my poor dog can't stand my pounding on the piano keys!"

Hilary White, *soprano*, who has just completed her freshman year in college, started playing the piano and singing in choirs in elementary school. The study of music became irreplaceable in her life when she joined the Piedmont Choirs, from which she graduated last year. Although still undecided on a major, she knows singing will always be part of her life. She has sung two other summers with the Choral Society.

Maria Altany, *soprano*, and Claire Michaels, *alto*, have also joined us for the summer, but their biographical information was not available before we went to press.

What a treat to have these accomplished young people with us! Please make them feel welcome, offer them your support, and enjoy the privilege of making grand music together.

— Carol Talbeck



Front row (left to right): Leanne Davis, Claire Michaels, Jessica Inwood, Jessica Ashman. Back row (left to right): Christina Li, Michelle An, Richard Fessler, Juan Grattan, Grahme Deasy. Not pictured: Maria Altany, Kevin Fugaro, Debra Gilkerson, Hilary White.

Education and Outreach

Music Classes a Resounding Success

We may not know where the songbirds go during winter, but now we know where our choristers go between rehearsal seasons – to music classes! You came in impressive numbers to the spring theory and vocal training classes, you dived in with great enthusiasm, and you asked for more in the postclass surveys. A total of 105 attended the classes, and 47 completed the surveys. Many of you said, in person and on the form, “Keep it coming!” You also asked for:

- Longer classes – at least one hour per class
 - A series of classes every rehearsal season
 - Sight singing and interval training, with beginning and advanced levels
 - Continuing vocal technique training
- You made insightful comments, both

about classes oriented to building musical skills in general, and about getting more information about the specific piece we are working on integrated into rehearsals. For example, one survey respondent said, “I would like to know more about the structure of the music we sing. I love Bob’s explanations of things like hemiolas and other structural bits.”

Several of you made an appeal for holding more sectionals, both early in the season to “pound notes” and later to resolve each section’s musical issues, rather than using up whole-group rehearsal time.

The reactivated Education and Outreach Committee is doing its part to help the Choral Society meet the

goal we all share to “get the next level.” The committee will continue to solicit your feedback on classes and compile it for Bob’s and the Board’s use in further planning. Also, we have decided to recruit student singers through Bay Area high school music teacher nominations year-round, not just for the summer session.

What’s next? As new classes and sectionals are offered, keep attending! Let Education and Outreach know what works and what you want more of. That’s why we’re here. And stay tuned to our website, www.sfchoral.org. It will soon have a link to an Education web page with many helpful tools and information just for you.

— Carol Talbeck

GETTING TO KNOW EMMA LOU DIEMER, PART I

Composer reveals details about new piece

Choral Society to present world premiere of Songs for the Earth

There is absolutely nothing like the sound of a large chorus, particularly with orchestra," says Emma Lou Diemer, who, commissioned by the San Francisco Choral Society, has written a new piece for us. It will receive its premiere performance in Davies Symphony Hall in the summer of 2004. When Diemer heard the Choral Society perform last year, she said she was "inspired by the group's great range of expression and nuance. It is a wonderful privilege to be asked to write a work for such a large and excellent chorus."

The new work, *Songs for the Earth*, is about 18 minutes long and is in six movements, but it took Diemer only a few days to sketch it out. First, she had to choose a text. She selected six poems on the theme of nature and the Earth – its beauty and its vulnerability. "I debated about the compositional style," she says. "Should the work be generally tonal, should it have much dissonance, should it be experimental at all?"

Based on the poems she had chosen, Diemer decided that the piece "needed to be impressionistic, lyrical, and dramatic." *Songs for the Earth* is "much more introspective than some of my other works. It is not a 'rafter-raiser' and should complement the huge and boisterous *Carmina Burana* on the same program with it."

The choral cycle is based on verses from *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* and on poetry by Emily Dickenson, Hildegard von Bingen, Mary Oliver, and the composer's own sister, Dorothy Diemer Hendry. Says Diemer, "My sister has written many poems over the years, and I've set many of them to music either as vocal solos or choral pieces, even a cantata. Her poetry is often about nature and the environment."

Dorothy Diemer Hendry has had a distinguished career in her own right,



Composer Emma Lou Diemer and her sister, poet Dorothy Diemer Hendry

as an educator in Huntsville, Alabama. One of her poems, "Towers of Light," evoking 9/11, was read last year in the U.S. House of Representatives and was entered into the Congressional Record. The poem her composer-sister chose for our piece, "Experiment," expresses concern for what we have done to the Earth and wonders what its fate and ours will be.

Robert Geary, who will conduct our world premiere, had this to say about performing new music: "It is essential that we embrace the experimentation, innovation, and creativity that is defining our world now. New music comes with risks and uncertainties. It often makes us face up to the complexities of the modern world. It is not an escape to the familiar; it is an embrace of the moment we live in. It is a privilege and an awesome challenge to take on the responsibility of preparing a new work. If we fail to understand the poetic intention of the music and we don't perform it well, the gift that it is to our world will never be known. I have a sense of reverence and vitality for this process."

How would Emma Lou Diemer

describe her own music? "It bridges the past and the present," she says. "Even in less traditional/more experimental writing of mine, there are always recognizable rhythms and chord formations. I have great respect for structure, for contrasts and developments and returns. In the work for the Choral Society there is much that will be familiar stylistically, probably nothing that will greatly surprise the listener. For voices, I like to write in an unforced, natural way, no leaping about from high note to low note that might obliterate the meaning of the text or the text itself. *Songs for the Earth* is calm and quiet; it has less emphasis on rhythm than some of my other works."

Diemer began to compose music as a young child, "little pieces for piano that my very patient piano teacher wrote down. As my piano technique advanced, the pieces became more difficult and involved, and I eventually learned to write them down myself. Most of my music, to this day, evolves from improvisations of mine that I polish and make presentable."

— O'Brien Young

San Francisco Choral Society joins Chorus America

What is Chorus America, which the San Francisco Choral Society recently joined? *Chorus America's mission is to strengthen choruses and increase appreciation of choral music so that more people are enriched by its beauty and power.*

The organization serves the spectrum of professional, volunteer, child/youth, and symphony/opera choruses. To accomplish its mission, Chorus America provides information, publications, conferences, consulting, training programs, surveys, networking, and awards to support choruses throughout North America. More than 1,200 choruses, individuals, and businesses are members of Chorus America. This powerful group of conductors, arts administrators, board members, singers, and choral music lovers is at the core of the growing choral movement in this country and Canada.

Last April, our Board President, Gale Townsley, participated in a Chorus Management Institute, underwritten in part by the Hewlett Foundation, on the Choral Society's behalf. In June she and Education Committee Chair Carol Talbeck attended the four-day Chorus America Annual Conference in Kansas City, Missouri. Our Board of Directors is now in the process of taking advantage of the wealth of information made available at both of these events. As one of our member benefits, our concerts will be advertised nationally on the Chorus America website and in their quarterly publication. To learn more about the organization, log on to www.chorusamerica.org.



TEAMWORK AT THE BALLPARK

Almost 375 linear feet of hot dogs (650 weenies) and over 140 pretzels disappeared down the gullets of hungry patrons at Pac Bell Park as 14 Choral Society singers and one choral patron staffed a refreshment booth at the June 5th Giants/Twins game. Our first fundraising event was a grand success!

We arrived at the ballpark at 3:45 P.M. sporting our new San Francisco Choral Society baseball caps. In typical boot-camp style, we were issued our uniform shirts, and we then scurried up to the Promenade level to our station – the Doggy Diner. Our state-of-the-art kitchen included a walk-in refrigerator, four pretzel-warming machines, three hot-cheese dispensers, a coffee and hot chocolate maker, and eight cash registers. Each register was equipped with an icebox, soft drink faucets, and a beer tap.

Our booth manager, Linda, gave us quick lessons on running the equipment, cooking hot dogs, and prepping nacho trays (which come in two sizes). We then raised the steel windows and awaited our customers.

And did they come! After a small trickle, we were soon swamped with hungry and thirsty patrons. Innings one through five literally flew by, as everyone hustled and bustled to meet the endless demands of the paying public.

We ran out of hot dogs three times.

A hot-cheese dispenser exploded in glorious fashion. The coffee machine overflowed like a volcano spewing lava. Even with these technical difficulties, coupled with a rookie crew, we were told that we had sold 20 percent more food and beer than the average crew does at an average evening game.

We really teamed together to achieve these numbers. Everyone worked their pants off, while having a great time making money for the Choral Society. In the words of one of our volunteers: "It was truly an experience! I was so wired when I got home it took me hours to unwind and get some sleep. It was definitely worthwhile as a fundraiser (just look at the numbers!), and maybe even more important, as a team builder among chorus members. I, for one, feel much more connected to the group now and to our joint responsibility for the financial side of the Choral Society."

In the course of the summer, we will work seven more games. As we go to press, after three games the Chorus Concessionaires have raked in a total of more than \$3,000! I expect about 15 people working per game, but there's always room for more. And thank you to all who have helped out so far. Please e-mail or call me if you are interested in participating, at Sam.aranda@preferredtrade.com, cell (415) 722-9575, work (800) 949-0232.

— Sam Aranda (3rd base)



Choral Society volunteers are also hitting home runs at Pac Bell Park.

SAVE ENTIRE
PAGE FOR
SILENT
AUCTION

Spotlight On Singers

Anna Alessandria, alto

Do you have to be born in Italy to be a Renaissance woman? If Anna Alessandria is any example, the answer is “Si, certo!” Scientist, musician, artist, sweater designer, legendary cook, and mother of three (including twins), Anna is a multi-talented person. She was born in a small town about ten miles from Messina, Sicily, and emigrated to the United States after marrying her Italian-American husband, Lorenzo. Anna has been a member of the San Francisco Choral Society since 1990. Her fellow alto Jane Lovell spoke with Anna in February.

Where does your love of music come from?

My passion for choral singing comes from my mother. She had a beautiful contralto voice, and she was my first music teacher. Our town was too small to afford musical instruments for school children, but my mother was a schoolteacher and she

taught her pupils to sing. I started helping her teach singing when I was six. I started piano lessons at about the same time and went on studying piano in middle school and high school, and I studied Gregorian chant with the organist of the cathedral in Messina. There was no one who could play the organ in our little church, so I was drafted to learn. I sang in the church choir, and I taught a children’s choir as well. It was quite a challenge because very few of my pupils could read music.

How did you learn Latin?

I went to a humanistic high school, where we studied both Latin and ancient Greek. I took Latin for eight years. In school, I only studied Latin to get a good grade. But today, I find I enjoy translating Latin.

Did you ever consider pursuing music as a career?

I would have loved to, but my father wanted me to learn something practical, so I studied chemistry and pharmacology.



Where did your scientific studies lead?
I received a Ph.D. in Pharmacology in 1958 from the University of Messina, one of the oldest universities in Italy.

So it’s Dr. Anna Alessandria?
(Laughing) I think you’re the only one who ever called me that! But I appreciate it. It wasn’t easy for a woman to get a doctorate from an Italian university in the 1950s.

After you came to the United States, how

ALESSANDRIA continued on page 10

Richard Stanton, bass

Who is that English guy? You know the one. The fellow who knows only one dynamic: fortissimo. The guy who won’t look up from his score. The one with the perfect rrrrrrrrrrrrolled r’s. That’s Richard Stanton. He joined the Choral Society two years ago with the a cappella concert in 2001.

Richard began singing in church as a soprano with a boys’ choir in his hometown of London. Puberty and a particularly nasty choral director temporarily derailed his vocal ambitions. After a brief 25-year hiatus, Richard returned to singing.

First he mastered the art of full-throated car vocalism, becoming quite a stylist of the later works of the Eagles. Many *Messiah* singalongs later, he became a student of Dr. Ruby Pleasure (yes, it’s true) at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. He earned his extension-course certificate with a finely nuanced performance of “If I Were a Rich Man.”

From there, it was a short leap to the Choral Society. In addition to providing booming pedal notes for the choir,



he also sings with a small ensemble of men from the chorus, in which he ... provides booming pedal notes.

Richard is fearless. This intrepid singer once tried to perform in a San Francisco

Lyric Opera production of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, despite never having sung the piece and having attended only one rehearsal. He is breathlessly awaiting his vocal inventory with Maestro Geary.

To pay the bills while his vocal career develops, Richard teaches at UC Berkeley, where he is an associate professor in Finance at the Haas School of Business. He researches the underlying mathematical structures of securitized contracts. He arrived at this eminently practical field following extensive vocational schooling: a math degree from Jesus College, Cambridge, and a Ph.D. from Stanford.

Richard is the proud father of two lovely girls: Caitlin, 12, and Phoebe, 10. Caitlin is a budding chess and discus protégée, while Phoebe aspires to be a horse whisperer. Choristers with questions about the Swiss Opening or the appropriate treatment for equine colic are encouraged to ask Richard for help. The girls live in Marin County and have been promised to Amy Marlowitz’ boys.

Richard’s hobbies include crew,

STANTON continued on page 10

ALESSANDRIA *continued from page 9*

did you get back into music?

I didn't, right away. I had three babies in two years, so as you can imagine, I was very busy at home. After the children were older, I joined the church choir at St. Patrick's in Larkspur, and that got me back into singing.

What's been your greatest musical experience?

Singing the Verdi *Requiem* in Italy in the ancient Roman amphitheater, the Arena de Verona, as a member of the World Festival Choir. The orchestra was conducted by Lorin Maazel; Luciano Pavarotti was the tenor soloist. The other soloists were Paul Plishka, Sharon Sweet, and Delora Zajick. There were 3,000 singers in the chorus, from countries all over the world. It was magical, spiritual, unreal. The concert was on an August night, and the beautiful blue sky gave way to twilight and then a full moon. As I sang, I thought of my mother, knowing how proud she would have been if she had lived to see her daughter singing Verdi in the Arena de Verona. The World Festival Choir was then associated with the United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees, and a portion of the concert proceeds went to help refugees. Three thousand voices, from all over the world, imploring God for peace. One of the singers from Japan was a survivor of the atomic bomb blast in Hiroshima. It

was a very moving experience. I will never forget it.

What was it like being onstage in a Roman amphitheater?

It was the opera season in Verona, and *Aida* was being produced. The lighting for that production lit the whole amphitheater, and it helped us see our music. Unfortunately, the light also attracted moths and mosquitoes. Pavarotti told us to be careful of what we might swallow when taking deep breaths! I got to meet him later when I sang with the same group in concerts in Norway and Sweden. He noticed my Italian name on the roster of singers and asked to meet me. He was very nice and autographed my score.

How did you happen to join the San Francisco Choral Society?

Rehearsals for the World Festival Choir performance in Verona were held at various venues around the world, including at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Andy Horn was the conductor. As it happened, his new chorus, the San Francisco Choral Society, was also rehearsing the Verdi *Requiem* at that time. Andy suggested that we come and practice the *Requiem* with the Choral Society, and that's how I became a member.

We're glad you did. Grazie, Dr. Anna. Prego!

— Jane Lovell

MASAOKA *continued from page 1*

festivals and avant-garde arts venues in Japan, Canada, Europe, Eastern Europe, and India. Masaoka lives in San Francisco and in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Robert Geary, artistic director of all three choirs involved in the project, offers these thoughts: "As Miya explained to me her concept of *While I Was Walking, I Heard a Sound ...*, my imagination was piqued by the sounds and sound shapes that she suggested. Vocalism has ventured far beyond the boundaries of what we think of with the idea of historical music. This will be the first adventure for the Choral Society into such a sound world, and it will cause us to stretch and grow and struggle as artists do in the creation of new music. There is a challenge and a

responsibility in the preparation of a new work that is unlike anything else in the performing arts world. We will give breath to a first performance that must accurately communicate the composer's intent. We will have to solve problems that have never been solved. It is very exciting — and nerve-wracking as well."

— O'Brien Young

A call for contributors

Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas to *The Society Page*. Writers and photographers are welcome too. For more information please contact the editors or send e-mail to news@sfchoral.org.

STANTON *continued from page 9*

squash, and treasure hunts (what can we say, he's English).

Vital Statistics

Nationality: *Naturalized U.S. citizen.*

Voice part: *Bass, low bass ... really, really low bass.*

Secret ambition: *To sing the national anthem at Pac Bell Park.*

Hidden talents: *Plays the piano; and has a workable knowledge of Latin, German, and French.*

Blind spot: *Possesses no knowledge whatsoever of any professional sport.*

— Roger King

75 works of art!

Don't miss the LIVE ART AUCTION, to be held concert weekend, on Sunday, August 24, from 3 to 6 P.M., in conjunction with the Masterworks Fine Art Institute, at the Historic Gas Light Building at 3636 Buchanan Street, between Bay and North Point, in San Francisco. A portion of the proceeds from the auction of 75 works of art will benefit the chorus and its education programs. We invite you to share the experience of a live auction, food, wine, and the chance to bring home a valuable piece of art while helping the Choral Society continue its tradition of bringing great choral music to the community.

Our newsletter gets a name

Congratulations to George Teekell, winner of the Name-the-Newsletter Contest, who has won two tickets to the Verdi *Requiem* concert for his witty entry, "The Society Page." Some of the other entries were also so clever or funny, we just have to include a few of them here: "Preaching to the Choir," "Staff Inflection," "Chorus Interruptus," "Hot Off the Choir Wire," "Newsworthy Notes," "High Notes," "Quarter Notes," "The Choral Voice," "Sound Bites," and Ian Crane's very clever title for those of us who joined in the Bob Geary era, "The Post-Horn." Thanks to all of you for your submissions!

VERDI *continued from page 1*

and vocal difficulties, made enormous demands on the 200 performers it required. Most surprising was such deep immersion in the creation of a Christian mass by a confirmed atheist like Verdi. There is no question this was a highly meaningful work for him, and some of the reasons for his extensive involvement in it can be surmised from the circumstances of his personal and professional life in his middle years.

Verdi was going through a major life transition at the time he began the *Requiem*, a condition not uncommon among composers of requiem masses. Brahms, Dvorak, and John Rutter, for example, overtly or covertly used their requiems to mourn a beloved parent or child. One major loss in Verdi's life at the time was of his great friend, the politician Alessandro Manzoni, whom he had idolized as the fierce political champion of a just and unified Italy as well as a great novelist and stylist of the modern Italian language. But Verdi was experiencing other severe psychological losses at this time, the result of problems for which there could be no illusion of healing through mourning, no matter how painful. Verdi reached for the sacred because he felt caught between forces in his life that seemed out of his control and relationships that were beyond repair.

Verdi had overcome other serious, life-altering experiences in the past. His first wife and two children had died in 1840, leaving only his daughter Filomena. He later decided to marry Giuseppina Strepponi, after many years of having her as his mistress. She was a well-known singer whose tempestuous personality made her unpopular with the public. When Verdi courageously forged ahead with the wedding, it cost him his relationship with his parents, his good name, and some financial security.

But renewed success and a relatively happy marriage were his until his late fifties, when the edifice began to crumble through a new series of losses. First was the death of Manzoni, which to Verdi meant the end of the political dream that had inspired his greatest operas. His marriage to Strepponi was now under increasing strain and in

danger of coming apart, due to his evolving love affair with Teresa Stoltz, the soprano who sang in the premiere performances of the *Requiem Mass*. Finally, the conductor Angelo Mariani, Stoltz's former longtime lover, who had been Verdi's close friend for 20 years, died in 1873, leaving Verdi no hope of repairing their damaged friendship. For Verdi, there were no heroic solutions or easy absolution for his contribution to the pain and humiliation his friend had undergone and his wife was enduring. The passions of a new love were in full play. But Verdi, despite his youthful energy and healthy physique, was now 60 and confronting the issues of aging without immediate hope of inner or outer comfort or repose. The personal drama he was facing was not only the death of a friend but the death of friendship, marriage, and hope for the future, combined with the start of an uncertain new relationship.

The *Mass* musically manifests the drama of these transitions in Verdi's life. He uses the Latin text of his *Requiem* like the libretto of an opera about death and rebirth. The music abounds with a dramatic passion different from and beyond its religious meaning. The chorus seems mostly to represent the fearful and lamenting souls of the dead, while the soloists watch the dying process and plead for mercy and release from death. But Verdi, the master dramatist, has also used his *Requiem Mass*, a Christian religious form celebrating death and rebirth, to capture the drama of human love, loss, sacrifice, and renewal, without appealing to a religious solution. Verdi's dislike of religiosity is often evident in the *Requiem*, as the setting of most movements can be more easily appreciated as inspired by psychological drama rather than religious fervor.

The events in Verdi's personal life that led to the creation of his *Requiem Mass* and its sumptuous form are complex but worth the telling. The story begins in 1868 with the death of the great composer Giacomo Rossini. Verdi proposed that Italian composers collaborate in writing a requiem mass to honor the dead genius, whom he

called the "glory of Italy." Verdi's friend Mariani was a member of the organizing committee and had also agreed to conduct the "Rossini" mass. But because of tangled finances and conflicts of interest, the mass was never completed. Verdi held Mariani responsible for the failure, and in a series of letters over the ensuing years castigated him on all counts, refusing to be mollified by Mariani's letters to him, filled with love and admiration. It is possible, however, that Verdi's rejection of his friend was fueled by the fact that when Verdi first met Teresa Stoltz, she and Mariani were engaged to be married. As Verdi's relationship with Stoltz developed into love, she broke off her engagement with Mariani.

Verdi and Stoltz were soon dining together every evening, but Verdi's wife, Strepponi, made sure these dinner trysts took place at the Verdi home. She was aware of the evolving affair between her husband and Stoltz, and to protect her marriage she established a sisterly bond with Stoltz. Nevertheless (or because of these machinations) Verdi was increasingly restless, suspicious, and unable to control his temper with his wife. He refused to take her on his travels and hardly spoke to her. She, who had once been his closest companion, did all she could to meet his every whim.

Stoltz attempted to free herself from this triangle by leaving Italy. She moved to Russia and claimed that she was retiring from singing. Although her singing career did not end, her intimate relationship with Verdi was put on hold. She and Strepponi actually corresponded with much affection during these years. Verdi and Strepponi remained married, but after Strepponi's death Verdi and Stoltz lived just a few houses apart and took vacations together. They aged well, and when he was 87 and she 66 they were still exchanging love letters. In 1897 he gave Stoltz the autographed score of the *Requiem Mass*, inscribed to her as "the first interpreter of this composition." Love conquers all!

— Pilar Montero and Arthur Colman

Note: Much of the material for this article was researched using Mary Jane Phillips-Matz's excellent *Verdi: A Biography*, Oxford University Press, 1993.

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2003 CALENDAR

Annual Silent Auction & Verdi <i>Requiem</i> Singalong (public invited to both) Lakeside Presbyterian Church Eucalyptus & 19th Avenue	Sat Aug 2 10:30 A.M.
Verdi <i>Requiem</i> Davies Symphony Hall	Fri & Sat Aug 22, 23
Live Art Auction Historic Gas Light Building 3636 Buchanan Street	Sun Aug 24 3 to 6 P.M.
White Elephant Sale	Sat Sep 20
Masaoka World Premiere Yerba Buena Center for the Arts	Fri & Sat Oct 10, 11
Bryan Baker and the Biebl Boys Community Music Center	Sun Oct 19 4 P.M.
Fauré <i>Requiem</i> St. Ignatius Church	Fri & Sat Nov 14, 15
Festival of Carols First Unitarian Universalist Church	Sat & Sun Dec 20, 21

Yes! I want to help The San Francisco Choral Society

The Choral Society has been a source of joy and satisfaction for singers and music lovers throughout the Bay Area. But our concerts come with staggering price tags—\$30,000 or more per show—and ticket revenues cover less than 65% of our operating costs. Your tax-deductible contribution can help us continue to bring great (and affordable) classical choral music to our community.

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