



The Chamber Singers perform Poulenc and Byrd, January, 2015

Chamber Singers to Offer November Lights on November 8

Recent years have seen the Rockbridge Chamber Singers establish themselves as an outstanding small ensemble through their sensitive and expressive performances of exceptional choral repertoire ranging from the Renaissance to the present day.

In this season's opening concert (on Sunday, November 8 at 3 p.m. at Lexington Presbyterian Church) the Chamber Singers will

explore the musical worlds of English composers across many centuries—the Renaissance English master, Thomas Morley; the early 20th-century phenomenon, Edward Elgar; and one of Britain's most celebrated new composers, Paul Mealer--AND the dazzling world of Norwegian-born Ola Gjeilo, among the most acclaimed creators of choral music today. This program, entitled *November Lights*, will

explore a wide range of musical and textual expression from dark to light. With their rich and varied emotional content, these pieces may stand as a metaphor for the lights of November, passing from the brightness of the warmer seasons into the soft and cherished light of winter.

This will be a stunning new experience for the Chamber Singers. Please make every effort to share it with them on November 8.

Welcome!

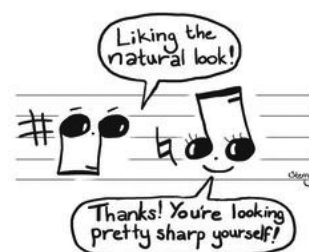
The Board of the Friends of the Rockbridge Choral Society welcomes new board members **Jane Birzenieks, Carlton Brinkley, Maria Nava, and Jennie Sikes.**

Jane feels fortunate that 12 years ago she and her husband, Buzz, settled in Lexington, where she could continue her passion for choral singing with the best of the best. For over 50 years she has joined hundreds of vocal music lovers under the direction of passionate and studied directors dedicated to interpreting the music of the masters for the pure pleasure of listening ears. She looks forward to assisting the board in its endeavors.

Carlton retired in 2002 after 32 years of teaching in the public schools. Since then, he has served as accompa-

nist for the VMI Glee Club as well as working at the George C. Marshall Museum and Research Library. Carlton is active with his church choir and substitutes as organist in local churches. He is an original member of the Rockbridge Chorus and continues to sing with the RCS and the Chamber Singers.

Maria is an educator and the mother of two Rockbridge Youth Chorale singers. Her daughter, Gabi, is starting her fifth year singing for the RYC, and her son, Sammy, will be in his second year in the K-2 choir. As a Lexington resident, she is proud of the wonderful work of the RCS in bringing choral music to our community; as a parent, she is grateful for the enriching musical opportunities for children of the RYC.



Hannah Stary

Jennie and her husband Bill relocated to Lexington in 2014. Jennie is a tax lawyer with special expertise in non-profit organizations. For years Jennie and Bill have wanted to be part of a choir. As they left their first choir practice at Lexington Presbyterian Church last fall, Sally Wiant encouraged them to join the RCS. They enjoyed their first season with the RCS and look forward to many more.



A NEWSLETTER FOR THE FRIENDS OF THE ROCKBRIDGE CHORAL SOCIETY
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RCS Celebrates its 40th Anniversary Season!

Editor's note: this is the first in a series of three articles on the history of the Rockbridge Choral Society

40 years ago this month, the Rockbridge Chorus held its first-ever rehearsal in Dunlap Auditorium of Lexington Presbyterian Church. The chorus was directed by Gordon Spice, director of the Washington and Lee Glee Club, and accompanied by Terry Strange of the music faculty at Southern Seminary.

Rockbridge County had, for many years, had a very active and talented group of singers who had participated in annual choral productions organized and directed by the distinguished local organist and choir director, Miss Mary Monroe Penick.

One of these occasions was an offering of the Brahms *Requiem* on December 9, 1974 in memory of Joseph James Murray, the beloved former pastor of Lexington Presbyterian Church. Miss Penick, who had organized the event, hired soloists, and rehearsed the 70-voice choir, broke her shoulder a couple of weeks before the performance and asked Gordon Spice to conduct the performance, which was held before a packed house.

After this moving performance and all that it meant to the community, it was clear that the time had come to form a permanent community chorus.

On April 15, 1975, a group of



Founders: The creation of the Rockbridge Chorus and Orchestra, supported by William F. McCorkle, Charlene Jarrett, Gordon Williams, and Charles Harer. (News-Gazette photo)



Elijah: The Rockbridge Chorus and Orchestra perform Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, December 12, 1976. (News-Gazette photo)

From the Artistic Director:



William McCorkle

The 2015-2016 RCS Season (with Mendelssohn's: *Elijah*)

It is with great joy that I announce our plans for another wonderful season of the Rockbridge Choral Society. This will be an exciting year for our singers and for our audiences.

The Rockbridge Chamber Singers will launch the season with *November Lights*, a program sampling music of many periods and colors, with music by Gjeilo, Morley, Elgar, and Mealeor. [See more about this program in a separate article in this newsletter.] The superb acoustic of Lexington Presbyterian Church will provide an ideal setting for this concert on Sunday, November 8 at 3 p.m.

December can't come without a treasured RCS tradition, the Holiday Concert. This year the Choral Society and the Rockbridge Youth Chorale will join forces to celebrate the arrival of the holidays in style on Saturday, December 5 at 7:30 p.m. at Lexington Presbyterian Church (with, as always, audience caroling at 7:15).

The RCS season will conclude with a performance of Felix Mendelssohn's great oratorio, *Elijah*, which the Choral Society will present, with orchestra and soloists, on Sunday, April 17, 2016 at 7 p.m. in Wilson Hall at W&L. *Elijah* is a monumental work by one of music's greatest masters. Our performance will take on special significance, coming as it does some forty years after the 1976 *Elijah*, the first major work offered by the (then) new Rockbridge Chorus and Orchestra.

The singers of the Rockbridge Choral Society join me in thanking you, the Friends, for your loyal support over the years. We thrill to perform such remark-

able repertoire, and we work diligently to give outstanding performances worthy of such great music. We look forward to sharing this wonderful season with you.

40 years ago

(Continued from page 1)



Robert Stewart (left), first director of the Community Orchestra; Gordon Spice (center) directed the Rockbridge Chorus; and Terry Strange (right), Chorus Accompanist.

local musicians headed by Charlene Jarrett, founder of The Rockbridge Fine Arts Workshop (later FAIR), gathered to formulate plans for a community chorus and orchestra. That first steering committee, which included Gordon Spice, Robert Stewart, Maxine Foster, Chuck Harer, Rae Hickman, Gordon Williams, and Margaret Williams, approached William McCorkle, Sr., president of United Virginia Bank-Rockbridge, for financial support. With an initial grant of \$5000 from the bank, and continuing grants for the next 13 years, the Rockbridge Chorus and Orchestra were launched in style.

The two groups, while also performing concerts independently,

frequently performed together in the early years. The inaugural concert, a joint one on November 22, 1975 in honor of St. Cecilia's Day, featured music by Ron Nelson, Henry Purcell, Zoltan Kodaly, Aaron Copland, Benjamin Britten, and Ralph Vaughan Williams. The chorus, directed by Gordon Spice, included 59 singers, and the orchestra, directed by Rob Stewart, boasted 50 players. In a letter to the editor of the News-Gazette praising the performance, Miss Penick wrote, "The music was lovely and most interesting. Some may have heard it on recordings, but as far as I know, this was the first time that we have heard it in actual performance here in Lexington."

The chorus and orchestra performed a second concert on March 13, 1976, another on November 6, 1976, and then on December 12, 1976 the chorus and orchestra together undertook their first full-length masterwork, Felix Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. Over 100 Rockbridge Chorus and Orchestra members took the stage at Jackson Memorial Hall at VMI, and public television station WVPT-TV taped the performance for later broadcast.

Several participants in that first season of The Rockbridge Chorus continue to sing with us today: Jean Eisenhower, Carlton Brinkley, John DeVogt, Matt Paxton, Jr., Barbara and John Winfrey, and Alice and Gordon Williams. This season, after 40 years of training and practice, they and the full RCS with professional orchestra and soloists will return to Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in a 40th anniversary performance not to be missed.

CALLING ALL SINGERS!

RCS/RYC Rehearsals begin:

RCS—Monday, September 14, 7:30 p.m., in the sanctuary of Lexington Presbyterian Church

RYC—K-2 choir, registration, Tuesday, September 8, 5:45-6:30 p.m., R.E. Lee Memorial Church choir room

RYC—3rd and Up choir, Tuesday September 8, 6:30-7:30 p.m., R.E. Lee Memorial Church choir room

RYC MS/HS Vocal Ensemble

Audition—Tuesday, September 15, 7:30-8:15 p.m., R.E. Lee Memorial Church choir room

From the RYC Director:

The Rockbridge Youth Chorale is undergoing many changes for the 2015-2016 season that will strengthen our mission of providing a quality choral program to young people throughout Rockbridge County and beyond. The RYC will offer choirs for levels K-2, and 3rd and Up, as in the past, and this year we hope to add a new auditioned ensemble for middle and high school students.

We also welcome Lori Parker as the new director of our K-2 singers. Lori comes to us with experience in vocal performance and elementary choral music. A full bio will be available on the RYC web page and Facebook page. We are so happy to have an additional director on board!

K-2 singers will have the opportunity to register and meet Mrs. Parker September 8 at 5:45 in the R.E. Lee Memorial Church choir room. Rehearsals will begin September 29.

The RYC 3rd and Up Choir will rehearse on Tuesdays from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. at R. E. Lee Memorial Church. Last season, a pull-out choir for middle school and high school RYC singers was available during the fall semester. This year, we plan to start an auditioned vocal ensemble for middle school and high school singers, which will focus on more challenging literature incorporating both traditional choral styles and modern *a cappella* singing. Auditions for the ensemble will be on Tuesday, September 15 from 7:30-8:15 p.m. at R. E. Lee Memorial Church immediately following our regular 3rd and Up Choir rehearsal. Please spread the word to any young people you know who love to sing and would enjoy this type of ensemble.

The RYC and RCS will combine forces to present a festive



Lacey Lynch

Holiday Concert on December 5. We are excited about this collaboration which will bring together both our choirs and our audiences!

Thank you for your continued support of the RYC and youth choral music in the Rockbridge area!

To our donors:

You are the BEST! In May of 2015, after the death of Friend and faithful supporter Evelyn Pankey McCorkle, the Board of the Friends of the Rockbridge Choral Society voted to establish, in her honor, an endowed chair for a concertmaster. The cost to endow that chair is \$20,000, and in just three months you have donated nearly \$11,000 to that end. This is a great tribute to Evelyn and reflects an on-going commitment to our community's long-standing support of vocal music. Please keep those gifts coming! We hope to meet our \$20,000 goal in time for the *Elijah* concert, on the day before her birthday.

At the same time, please don't forget your regular, annual giving, which will go to support our 40th anniversary season! Any gift of \$250 or more will entitle the donor(s) to attend our special "Music Among Friends" concert.

Remember: October 31 is the cut-off day for gifts that will be listed on the 2015-16 programs.

2015-2016 RCS/ RYC Season Performance Dates to Remember

Sunday, November 8, 3:00 p.m.
Rockbridge Chamber Singers
November Lights
Lexington Presbyterian Church

Saturday, December 5, 7:30 p.m.
RCS/ RYC Holiday Concert
Lexington Presbyterian Church
Community Caroling begins at 7:15

Sunday, April 24, 7:00 p.m.
RCS with Orchestra and Soloists
Mendelssohn: *Elijah*
Wilson Hall, W&L

RYC Spring Concert, TBA

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