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John Corigliano's *Of Rage and Remembrance*: Community and Ritual in the Age of AIDS

BY ANNE E. LYMAN

*I've been thinking that we live in a noncommittal age...
There's a lot of music now that avoids human contact...
There's also the whole idea that music is something to accompany meditations, thought,
or doing the dishes—that music should exist so you don't have to listen to it.*¹

—John Corigliano, 1993

*For singers, we are being pretty unvocal about AIDS.*²

—William Parker (1943-1993), baritone and compiler of *The AIDS Quilt Songbook*.

There are roughly 33 million people living with HIV or AIDS around the world. About 1.2 million live in the United States, with approximately 50,000 new American cases being diagnosed every year. Today HIV/AIDS is more noteworthy for its rapid spread throughout undeveloped countries.³ Yet its progression from a few isolated cases to a full-blown pandemic began in the United States, in the early 1980s. Doctors, not knowing how to label the “unexpected clusters of cases” of the disease that was killing gay males in urban centers, called it GRID—Gay-Related Immune Deficiency—thus creating, and subsequently promoting, a stigma that would shape the medical, political, and social identities of AIDS in America. To say that Americans feared for their lives in the early years is no understatement. Ignorance of the disease’s method of transmission—“will I get AIDS if I shake hands with a gay man?”—led to fear and intolerance of an already isolated social group. Unaffected Americans grew accustomed to living with AIDS, while its first victims, gay men, were struggling to define their place in this new world.

Although the Stonewall Riots of 1969 served as the catalyst for gay rights, the resulting “Gay Revolution” of subsequent years did little to foster a sense of identity in the fledgling community.⁴ It wasn’t until the public starting viewing AIDS victims as degenerates that the gay population had a cause around which to rally.

As AIDS fatally struck at the heart of the American urban gay community, musicians mobilized with a wide variety of responses. Many emerging works were emotionally charged with anger and frustration. One of the most notable was *Masque of the Red Death* (1988), composed by musician and performance artist Diamanda Galás in memory of her brother Philip Dmitri who died of AIDS. In speaking about her composition before the New Music Seminar in New York in July 1988 she bluntly stated her feelings regarding the AIDS crisis: “[*Masque of the Red Death*] is dedicated to my brothers and sisters, persons with AIDS who are living and dying in Cadillacs, in hotel rooms, crucified in hospitals, and everywhere you don’t think

¹ Ann McCutchan, *The Muse that Sings: Composers Speak about the Creative Process* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 40.

² Jeffrey Stock, foreward to *The AIDS Quilt Songbook*, by William Bolcom, et al. (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1994), iii.

³ HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. For the purpose of this article it is understood that the term AIDS will refer to both.

⁴ See especially David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004), and Martin B. Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Dutton, 1993).

they are.”⁵ Galás’s harsh words are reflected in her music: it is music of rage, meant to shock listeners—in her mind “impotents and cowards”—out of an apathetic state.

New York-based composer John Corigliano’s *Of Rage and Remembrance* (1991) presents another intriguing case study. Commissioned by the Seattle Men’s Chorus, the New York City Gay Men’s Chorus, and the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus, it is a single-movement work for mezzo-soprano, boy soprano, male chorus, chimes, and low strings (eight cellos and four double basses), based on the third movement of his Symphony No. 1 (1989), which was the first large-scale concert work inspired by the AIDS crisis. As the composer explains, the symphony arose out of real fear for the lives of his friends, rather than an abstract concern for the plight of the gay community:

*The combination of the loss of so many friends—
I stopped counting when I reached a hundred—
and this other-worldly scene of most of society
going about their business blithely unaware that
so many around them were dying...this just
seemed an epic, epic tragedy to me.*⁶

Like Symphony No. 1, *Of Rage and Remembrance* is a programmatic work, and its personal nature elicits specific emotional responses from the listener. However, it contains two important elements the symphony does not—sung text and performance ritual—which the composer uses to create a sense of community. Christopher Small’s concept of *musicking* (“Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do”)⁷ provides a way of viewing this potent composition as an active communal event, one in which performers and listeners can experience the social and psychological ramifications of living in the age of AIDS.

By virtue of its compositional technique alone, *Of Rage and Remembrance* compels communal participation, not only in the music itself but also by the very nature of its conception. It is built upon the same dodecaphonic chaconne as the third movement of Symphony No. 1 (“Chaconne: Giulio’s Song”). Tonal

melodies, based on verbal eulogies by William M. Hoffman (a friend of Corigliano’s who also wrote the libretto for *The Ghosts of Versailles*), play out against this background, winding their way throughout the piece in a plainly “quiltish” manner.⁸ In this way the composer intentionally “embodies” rather than “describes” the AIDS crisis. As the work unfolds Corigliano takes us through a systematically conceived progression of emotions: denial, anger, remembrance, and through remembrance, to acceptance—feelings similar to those of a person who is suffering from AIDS, experienced either directly or indirectly through a loved one.⁹ Near the conclusion, individual chorus members are given the opportunity to remember friends who have died by interjecting their names freely into the musical fabric, while singers assigned to play chimes toll them at random and are instructed to exit at a slow pace. By combining this simple stage direction and aleatoric technique, Corigliano essentially dissolves the form of the piece into a world of sonic experiences that transcend the limitations of a specific genre.¹⁰ Traditional boundaries between performer and audience are thus blurred into a kind of ritualized experience for everyone present.

Of Rage and Remembrance begins with the mezzo-soprano soloist singing text that is rhetorical and questioning, in which the initial sense of rage is clear:

*Was there a time before the sorrow—
Days of double darkness,
Nights of blinding light?
Is there life outside the terror:
Waking from an airless dream
To the silence of an empty room?*

*This is the season of stone, you tell me,
When dead leaves lace the garden wall,
And berries dry in the bone-cold air,
And the brittle moon rules the ashen sun.
Bear it! bear it, you tell me,
This is the season of stone.*

Hoffman’s text, sung in a recitative style, introduces a single person, alone “in an empty room,” without any

⁵ Michael Flanagan, “Invoking Diamanda,” in *Life Sentences: Writers, Artists, and AIDS*, ed. Thomas Avena (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1994), 170-71. For more on Galás and her work see also Rebecca A. Pope and Susan J. Leonardi, “Divas and Disease, Mourning and Militancy: Diamanda Galás’s Operatic Plague Mass,” in *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference*, ed. Richard Dellamora and Daniel Fischlin (New York: Columbia University press, 1997), 315-34.

⁶ Mark Adamo, *John Corigliano: A Monograph* (Todmorden, England: Arc Music, 2000), 22. It was upon hearing the news that his friend, pianist Sheldon Shkolnik, had been diagnosed with AIDS that Corigliano first felt the impact of the epidemic.

⁷ Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 1998), 2.

⁸ Corigliano has cited the AIDS Quilt as being a source of inspiration behind Symphony No. 1 and *Of Rage and Remembrance*. See the composer’s program note for Symphony No. 1, posted on his website, accessed December 19, 2011, <http://www.johncorigliano.com/index.php?p=item2&sub=cat&item=13>.

⁹ Here I am purposefully evoking the five stages of grief and bereavement as laid out by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her groundbreaking book *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969). Kübler-Ross identifies these stages as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

¹⁰ See Ruth Finnegan, “Music, Experience, and the Anthropology of Emotion,” in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (New York: Routledge, 2003), 183.

communal support. The words paint images that are reminiscent of the physical symptoms of AIDS: “bone-cold,” “brittle,” and “ashen” could just as easily describe a body suffering from its effects. The bleak opening question—“Was there a time before sorrow?”—begs the immediate answer, “No,” as if to deny any further hope. The second stanza introduces the idea that the speaker is a seemingly disbelieving observer (or perhaps victim) in conversation with someone whose words are not known. The plaintive cry, “Bear it!” (the only text to be repeated twice), is met with silence before the mood moves from skepticism to a more hopeful call for remembrance with the chorus’s first entrance.

The spare musical texture reinforces the isolation depicted by the text. Static chords in the low strings, almost too soft and sporadic to provide any sense of harmonic stability, support the soloist’s angular, rhythmically unpredictable lines, producing a sense of timelessness. At the climactic utterance, “This is the

season of stone,” the mezzo-soprano arrives dramatically on middle C. After a short transition, the chorus’s opening phrase begins on a unison B-natural, which serves almost as an echo, or a memory, pitched slightly lower than the previous thought, as the soloist’s isolated despair gives way to the comfort of a community in mourning. Text, texture, voicing, rhythm, and pacing are all affected at this juncture as Corigliano employs more pointedly expressive scoring. The homorhythmic text setting on the initial B-natural splits into two-voiced counterpoint, and the viewpoint changes as those who were listening (in this case many singers representing one community) now become the speakers (See Example 1, below):

*But remember the crack of the ice-locked lake,
And the fog on the hyacinth roads.
Remember the breeze through the fields at dawn,
Cascading the trees of our youth-dark hair.
I remember...*

The musical score for Example 1 consists of two systems of music. The first system, starting at measure 44, features two vocal parts: Chorus I (Tenor and Bass) and Chorus II (Tenor and Bass). The lyrics for the first system are: "But re-mem-ber the crack of the ice-locked lake, and the fog on the hy-a-cinth roads. Re-mem-ber the breeze through the fields at dawn, Cas-cading the trees of our youth-dark hair. I remember...". The second system, starting at measure 48, continues the lyrics: "hy-a-cinth roads. Re-mem-ber the breeze through the fields at dawn, Cas-cading the trees of our youth-dark hair. I remember...". The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp* and *mf*, and includes triplets in the vocal lines.

Example 1
Of Rage and Remembrance: First choral entrance, mm. 44–51 (choral parts only)
Music by John Corigliano

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The first-person perspective is introduced with two utterances of “I remember” as the chorus settles into opposing chords. A third statement of “remember” resolves poignantly over a B-flat major chord, shifting the tonal center down one more half-step as if the voices are descending even further into memory, while a mournful solo cello emerges briefly into the foreground. At this point Corigliano introduces his own personal remembrances. In a quasi-collage compositional style (evoking another pointedly “quiltish” image) he employs soloists from within the chorus to “call out.”

Giulio Sorrentino, cellist:
You were the radiance of my youth.

Freddy, Fortunato Arico:
Giulio's teacher. Goodbye.

Paul Jacobs:
Brilliant pianist and dry wit.
Farewell.

J.J. Mitchell:
Muse of poets and painters.
Adieu.

Jacques Chwat:
A cabalist and agnostic,
You walked among the living guided by the
dead. Maya zhizn, maya maledost,
Prashchai, prashchai.¹¹

Mark Pearson and Jim Moses:
Friends, lovers,
Died in eighty-eight.

Robert Jacobson:
A tall, kind man with a dazzling smile
Opera was his passion.

Nikos Kafkalis:
I'll never forget you!

Anthony Holland:
Man of the theatre.
Oh, Tony, I miss you so!
Lebe wohl.

Here Corigliano dictates how his own experiences are transmitted, in a manner that is not unlike other responses to AIDS in which artists desire to “have an immediate effect on how [their creation] is perceived and regulated.”¹² In this case he draws upon musical characteristics of his own youth: the first two melodies, sung by soloists, spell out a twelve-tone row (purposefully disengaged from any “limiting” tonal center), while simultaneously two solo cellos spin out a romantic duet firmly rooted in B-flat major, based on improvisations that Corigliano and his friend Giulio Sorrentino recorded while in college.¹³ The composer roots himself in the past, in a time before AIDS, and through this remarkable combination of text and music he inserts an indelible personal stamp into the score: “For me, the theme [of a piece] has to grow out of the need of the piece I’m writing.”¹⁴

After a brief reprise of opening musical materials and text, the start of the final section is signaled by resolution of the phrase, “I remember” (this time sung by both mezzo-soprano and chorus) over the same B-flat major chord and solo cello line that previously marked the introduction of Corigliano’s personal reminiscences. The composer now releases control and gives it to the performers. An effective use of chance technique creates a reassuring sense of community. As the chorus (or an optional semi-chorus) continues singing long chords as part of the chaconne—“Farewell,” “Adieu,” “Goodbye”—individual singers improvise in the following manner: “They are members of the chorus who have lost friends and wish to remember them. Names and farewells are intoned on given note.”¹⁵ At the same time, the chimes (played by members of the chorus), “toll freely in slower tempo; players rise and slowly exit, continuing to toll.”¹⁶ (See Example 2, next page)

¹¹ “My life, my youth, farewell, farewell,” Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*.

¹² Dennis Altman, “Psycho-Cultural Responses to AIDS,” in *Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS*, comp. Ted Gott (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1994), 167.

¹³ This same cello melody provides the melodic foundation for the third movement of Corigliano’s *Symphony No. 1*.

¹⁴ McCutchan, *The Muse that Sings*, 38.

¹⁵ Corigliano, *Of Rage and Remembrance*, 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

153 Ten. *mf*

Solo Voices*

Chorus I & II (opt. small choir)

Re - mem - ber. Fare -

Re - mem - ber. Fare -

Ch.

(exit)

(Bb) (exit silently)

157 Bar. *mf* Ten. *mf*

well. A - dieu. Good -

well. A - dieu. Good -

(exit)

(exit)

* These voices are not the solo quartet; they are members of the chorus who have lost friends and wish to remember them. Name and farewell are intoned on given note.

** Chimes toll freely in slower tempo; players rise and slowly exit rear of stage, continuing to toll.

Example 2
Of Rage and Remembrance: Concluding section (excerpt), mm. 153–160 [string parts shown in piano reduction]
Music by John Corigliano

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Eventually the improvised lines give way to spoken lines of farewell, as if the composer wishes to divorce the text from the music in order to implant a more powerful sense of community and connection with his audience. The lingering notes of the mezzo-soprano soloist materialize one last time, her words now a memory themselves as they recede from the foreground into the background:

*Though I live to be a thousand years,
I'll never forget you.*

As the final notes in the strings dissolve into a static open fifth (Bb-F), a boy soprano, who has remained hidden from within the chorus, is revealed both physically and aurally. He sings the prominent cello motif from the middle section of the piece to the Hebrew text of *Psalm 23*: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil: for thou art with me.” (See Example 3, below)

The ritual of remembering was of great significance to Corigliano in composing *Of Rage and Remembrance*, as was the sense of community it would bring to the gay men’s choruses that commissioned the work. In his own words:

In [Of Rage and Remembrance], AIDS is not only context but content. [It] cannot be performed abstractly, as just another piece in the choral repertoire. Its audience is not really the audience for choral music; its audience is the community blighted by AIDS.¹⁷

As part of his compositional philosophy, Corigliano has stated that the live performance of his music is necessary in order for it to be fully understood.¹⁸ In this way the concept of “musicking” provides a useful portal through which to view the conclusion of the work, where the composer brings disparate elements together in a kind of “communion” of

The image shows a musical score for Example 3, consisting of two systems of music. The first system starts at measure 170 and ends at measure 173. It features a vocal line for a Boy Soprano (hidden in chorus) and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics: "Gahn kee ay-laykh b' gaytzahl mohv-ess oh ee-raw raw". The piano part includes a cello motif. The second system starts at measure 174 and ends at measure 179. The vocal line has the lyrics: "kee ah taw ee mo - dee." The piano part includes a cello motif and a performance instruction: "(gradually slow tolling to a stop)".

Example 3
***Of Rage and Remembrance*: Final bars, mm. 170-179 [string parts shown in piano reduction]**
Music by John Corigliano

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¹⁷ John Corigliano, program note for *Of Rage and Remembrance*, accessed January 5, 2012, <http://www.johncorigliano.com/index.php?p=item2&sub=cat&item=81>.

¹⁸ Douglas Lee, *Masterworks of the Twentieth-Century: The Modern Repertory of the Symphony Orchestra* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 129.

experience. The chorus members, by singing and then speaking their individual remembrances, invite all present—instrumentalists and audience members—to do the same mentally and emotionally. As the piece “disintegrates,” listeners are liberated from being centered on a formal musical event, and the mind has little choice but to wander. The ending is not bound together by melody, which is breaking down, but rather by a ceaselessly moving impression that was very significant for Corigliano: “Most people think that music is generated from melody, but I think that melody is actually very difficult to remember. What’s most important in a piece is shape and direction. What people remember best is sonority.”¹⁹

The active dissolution of musical materials is Corigliano’s way of imprinting our memories with the most powerful moments of the piece. This final “communion” also represents something pertinent to the formation and staying power of a community: ritual.²⁰ By invoking familiar rituals, Corigliano solidifies the community he so carefully crafted from the work’s opening bars. With the return of the cello motif coupled with the comforting words of *Psalms 23* he invites his participants to remember a sweeter world and, ultimately, to accept a future tainted by AIDS.

Corigliano’s role as a gay composer working within New York’s community of gay artists may also shed light on further understanding *Of Rage and Remembrance*.²¹ Paul Attinello, in examining the establishment of gay men’s choruses, has characterized the gay social construct as containing “a complex field of values and relationships that is suffused with both traditional American middle-class values and intense reactions against those values.”²² This seemingly paradoxical relationship led to a wide variety of public responses, encompassing the violent to the pacifist. Gay artists, especially those living in urban areas, sought outlets to combine their art with a

political and social message before AIDS even became an issue.

Corigliano’s narrative on his own sexuality and its connection to his music has been limited.²³ In an intentionally clinical statement, he scoffs at the notion that a direct link can be drawn: “Art is a distillation of everything you are, and therefore you can’t identify any single influence.”²⁴ Despite the impersonal nature of his words, Corigliano leaves open the possibility that his homosexuality is a part of that “distillation.” For Corigliano, the AIDS cause allows for a strengthening of the members of his community, whether in support of each other, as a force against discrimination, or simply as a group determined not to be ignored.

Throughout America’s history music has served as a tool for social awareness and change (in some generations more potently than in others), and it can function as “a catalyst for social engagement and a powerful agent in the creation of cultural awareness.”²⁵ Musicking across various social groups, such as the “us” vs. “them” of the AIDS era, attempts not only to foster understanding but also to provide a communal outlet for grief sharing. As Christopher Small states: “To take part in a music act is of central importance to our very humanness, as important as taking part in the act of speech.”²⁶ By filling a communicative void during a time when “SILENCE = DEATH,” *Of Rage and Remembrance* brings people together through the act of performance, providing an opportunity for the public to witness and share the grief and frustration of the gay population, which remains profoundly affected by the culture of fear and intolerance surrounding the blight of AIDS.

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¹⁹ McCutchan, *The Muse that Sings*, 38.

²⁰ Ruth Finnegan describes how ritual in music can evoke an emotional response: “Rituals are often intershot [sic] with music, managing fraught occasions in human lives and presenting organized occasions for emotional deployment where...it makes no sense to draw an opposition between thought and feeling.” Finnegan, “Music, Experience, and the Anthropology of Emotion,” 186. (For a full citation, see fn 10 above).

²¹ Scholars have been openly engaged in the debate regarding sexual affiliation of composers only within the past twenty years, encouraged by a panel on gay issues in music—the first of its kind—held by the American Musicological Society in 1990. Resulting studies are numerous and include Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America’s Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, eds., *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Sophie Fuller and Lloyd Whitesell, eds., *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

²² Paul Attinello, “Authority and Freedom: Toward a Sociology of the Gay Choruses,” in *Queering the Pitch*, 315.

²³ By contrast many living American composers have openly discussed how their sexual orientation has affected their compositional style. David Del Tredici has stated that he feels his music is a direct result of his difficult upbringing as a gay man in a generally homophobic society: “Only in music could I overcome this difficulty and express the way I really felt. And people would applaud my displays of feeling without ever knowing what might be behind them.” Alternatively Ned Rorem concedes that it is impossible to generalize such an issue: “No sooner do you define a gay sensibility than along comes some other composer who turns the whole argument on its head.” See

K. Robert Schwartz, “Composers’ Closets Open for All to See,” *New York Times*, June 19, 1994, Arts and Leisure section.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Ajay Heble, “Take Two/Rebel Musics: Human Rights, Resistant Sounds, and the Politics of Music Making,” in *Rebel Musics: Human Rights, Resistant Sounds, and the Politics of Music Making*, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2003), 235.

²⁶ Small, 8.

Summer Festivals

The Yale International Choral Festival and Symposium

June 19–23, 2012, New Haven, CT

The first annual Yale International Choral Festival and Symposium brought together choral musicians from across the globe to engage in an extraordinary array of performances, clinics, panel discussions and presentations, united by the intriguing theme, “Choirs Transforming Our World.” It was organized by Artistic Director Jeffrey Douma, Director of the Yale Glee Club and Associate Professor of Conducting at the Yale School of Music, in collaboration with the Conductors Without Borders network of the International Federation of Choral Music (IFCM), the International Conductors Exchange of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), and New Haven’s International Festival of Arts and Ideas. The Yale Glee Club and the Yale Alumni Choir Foundation were also integral to the success of the weeklong event.

Festival guest choirs included the Imilonji Kantu Choral Society from South Africa, Gobingca George Mxadana, Music Director; the Manado State University Choir of North Sulawesi province in Indonesia, André de Quadros, conductor; the Chorus of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, Yang Hongnian and Yang Li, conductors; the Cambridge University Chamber Choir, Martin Ennis, conductor; and Joyful Noise, an adult choir with physical and neurological challenges and acquired brain injuries, Alison Fromm, Director. Members of the organizing committees included Phillip Brunelle, Mary Lou Aleskie, André de Quadros, Mary Cohen, and Catherine Roma.

The Yale Alumni Choir rehearsed throughout the five days and presented an impressive and memorable culminating performance before a full house in Yale’s Woolsey Hall. Two hundred fifty singers came together to perform repertoire that included a Chinese folk song arranged by Cai Yuwen, a South African song marking Nelson Mandela’s 1990 release from Robben Island Prison, a traditional Balanese song, *Janger*, arranged by Budi Susanto Yohanes, as well as compositions and arrangements by Fenno Heath, Jeffrey Douma, Alice Parker and Robert Shaw, Colin Britt, and Hubert Parry. The program closed with Giuseppe Verdi’s cantata, *Inno Delle Nazioni* (“Hymn of the Nations”), accompanied by the New Haven Symphony Orchestra and featuring tenor soloist Russell Thomas. Verdi wrote the piece for London’s 1862 World Exposition, and it includes rousing quotes of patriotic songs and anthems from France, Italy, and Great Britain.

In preparation for this concert, the Yale Alumni Choir was coached by the conductors of the Chinese, Japanese, and South African choirs, as well as by Martin Ennis, conductor of the Cambridge University Chamber Choir, which performed a program of *a cappella* works on the opening night of the symposium. Jeffrey Douma led his newly formed professional choir, the Yale Choral Artists, in a concert during the week that included William Bolcom’s *The Mask* and Dominick Argento’s *Walden Pond*. Together with the Yale Collegium Players, directed by Robert Mealy, the Yale Choral Artists also accompanied the Mark Morris Dance Company in a performance of Bach’s *Jesu, Meine Freude* and Vivaldi’s *Gloria* at the Schubert Theater, with Mark Morris conducting.

Distinctive opportunities to learn how different conductors work with their ensembles, and to gather information about choral music and performance from different parts of the world were in abundance throughout the week. The Chinese choir demonstrated warm-up sequences for work on breathing, vowel modulation, and intonation. Dressed in colorful traditional clothing, the South African adult choir introduced the variety of tribal groups in their country and illustrated cultural and musical characteristics of their people and their music. Members of the young Indonesian choir provided insight into the diverse cultures and languages that can be found on the seventeen thousand islands comprising their primarily Muslim country. They sang four songs from varied regions and performed a unique arrangement of a short Indonesian work that blended into Orlando Gibbons’s *O Clap Your Hands*. In addition, three international conducting fellows (one from Hong Kong, one from the United States, and one from Venezuela) were selected to work with the visiting choirs and were coached in master classes by Marguerite Brooks, Jeffrey Douma, Martin Ennis, Yang Hongnian, and Yang Li.

The festival concluded with a two-day symposium that raised many important questions. Can choral music serve everyone? How do you define excellence in choral music? Do conductors underestimate or overestimate the power of choral music? Do audiences always have to come to choirs, or should choirs go to them? These are only a few of the many issues that were addressed in a wide variety of thought-provoking panel discussions, as well as salon presentations in which presenters briefly introduced their projects and participants engaged with them in meaningful dialogue. Salon topics included: establishing international connections with musicians in other countries; understanding world cultures through singing;

community choir outreach to marginalized sectors of society; the arts as a tool for social justice; music and social responsibility; children's choir performance experiences with programs on war and violence; and real-life examples of the transformative power of world choral music.

Several presentations addressed underserved populations, including one panel that brought together the founders of three different prison choirs. Another session was devoted to ways in which conductors are bringing choral music to people facing homelessness, poverty, lack of education, or the preventable spread of infectious disease. Chicago Children's Choir conductor Mollie Stone shared insights gained in South Africa, where she studied how people are using choral music in the struggle against HIV; Timothy DeWerff described the Yale Alumni Choir's community outreach activities, such as singing at retirement homes and urban schools; Helen Cha-Pyo, Artistic Director of the Jirani Cultural Organization, discussed her experiences working with children's choirs in Harlem and in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya. There was also a presentation on LGBT choirs, from the more traditional adult men's and women's ensembles to Susan Haugh's *Dreams of Hope*, a multidisciplinary arts organization in Pittsburgh for LGBT youth and allies. Additional topics included building meaningful choral exchanges, the relationship between choral singing and mental well-being, and Threshold Choirs, a network of choirs "who serve to bring ease and comfort to those at the thresholds of living and dying."

The Yale International Choral Festival and Symposium provided a week of rich experiences for singers, listeners, conductors, and presenters. Each day was filled with beautiful, inspiring music and information designed to lead participants to think and, hopefully, act in new and meaningful ways as they share the choral art. Expanding choral musicians' ideas to include transformative ways to work with more diverse populations will undoubtedly become an integral part of the choral world of the future.

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The Oregon Bach Festival Master Class in Conducting

June 28–July 15, 2012, Eugene, OR

When Bach's Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to St. Matthew was first performed on Good Friday 1727 at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, the congregation may not have been aware that they were hearing one of the greatest masterworks of religious art in Western civilization.¹

Similarly, when University of Oregon professor Royce Saltzman invited Helmuth Rilling to Eugene for a series of workshops in 1970 it was likely that neither the participants, organizers nor the community realized they were witnessing the start of what would become one of the most important summer music festivals in the world. Since its humble beginnings the Oregon Bach Festival has grown in size and stature, at present encompassing twenty-four concerts in seven Oregon communities. In spite of its remarkable growth, the master class in conducting has remained a cornerstone of the festival. Since the very early years, conductors have made pilgrimage to Eugene for the opportunity to study with Rilling and work with world-class musicians.

Last year a notice circulated that British conductor and keyboardist Matthew Halls would replace Helmuth Rilling as Artistic Director after the 2013 season. Because of this a record number of candidates applied to the master class, which focused on Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. Over the course of two weeks nine participating conductors were immersed in the work. Together with class director Thomas Sommerville, Rilling coached them first in piano rehearsals, then with a quintet of professional orchestral players, soloists and chorus, and finally with a full ensemble. He addressed the technical points of the conductors' gestures and drilled them on the details of the story. It seemed as if Rilling knew the emotional content of every word, and he consistently queried the conductors on their musical choices, always urging them to refer back to the libretto as well as to the character of the music to inform their decisions. He encouraged them to convey the drama through facial expression while at the same time being able to use clear and concise motions to aid the musicians in the many technical challenges presented by the score.

The master class is only one aspect of the festival, and the conductors were able to attend many of the performances. Two concerts stood out from the rest. On July 7th Artistic Director designate Matthew

¹ Peter Bergquist, program note for the Oregon Bach Festival's performance of the *St. Matthew Passion* by Johann Sebastian Bach. July 15, 2012.

Halls led a program that included Tippet's *A Child of Our Time*, which contained many moments of sublime beauty. Especially memorable was soprano Tamara Wilson's "How can I cherish my man in such days?" featuring a virtuoso display of feathery-soft, stratospheric singing that was breathtaking.

Another highlight was Rilling's July 11th Bach concert dedicated to the sixtieth wedding anniversary of Royce and Phyllis Saltzman. Rilling has had a long and lasting friendship with the Saltzmans, and this program was his public gift to them. It included the motets *Singet dem Herrn, Jesu meine Freude*, and *Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf*, along with the Harpsichord Concerto No. 1 in D minor and the Concerto for Violin and Oboe in C minor. Just before the violin and oboe concerto Rilling took a moment to liken the slow movement to a conversation between two lovers. The ensuing performance, exquisitely played by soloists Gabriel Adorján and Allan Vogel, was masterful. A spirited interpretation of *Der Geist hilft* concluded the program, the final movement of which seemed to be as fast as the singers could sing. But instead of being harried and ragged, the breakneck rendition was filled with joy and exuberance, perhaps inspired by the celebration of Rilling's long time friends, or by the nostalgic realization that there are only a few concerts remaining under his tenure as artistic director.

The tenor of the festival changed following this performance; the emotional spirit of the evening seemed to spill over and permeate all of the subsequent events. Rilling continued his high level of instruction, but he was more apt to share personal anecdotes, such as one that took place during a visit to the United States early in his career when he heard Eugene Ormandy conduct the *St. Matthew Passion*. At the depiction of the earthquake following Jesus's death, which was scored by Bach for only the continuo of the first orchestra, Ormandy had all of the strings from both orchestras play the part in unison. When Rilling asked Ormandy about this, Ormandy quipped, "If Bach had my Philadelphia Orchestra, he would have done the same!"

On July 15th the festival culminated with Rilling conducting the *St. Matthew Passion*. The singers and instrumentalists were in fine form and the final choral movements were especially moving. The arias contained many special moments. In "Erbarme dich" Rilling crafted an elegantly stylized and simple orchestral backdrop for violinist Gabriel Adorján and alto Sophie Harmsen to intertwine their richly ornamented melodies. Soprano Hanna Elisabeth Müller's shimmering tone was perfectly blended with melancholy to create moments of utter heartbreak in "Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben." The emotional

high point was the rich bass aria "Mache dich, mein Herze, rein." Rilling and bass Markus Eiche perfectly captured the warmth of this aria in a performance so moving that one could see the tears flowing down the faces of many choirsters.

A large part of the *St. Matthew* is the recitatives. Tyler Duncan's portrayal of Jesus was perfectly calibrated, modulating from restrained understatement to passionate power with deftness and ease. The Evangelist was sung by last minute replacement Nicholas Phan. While some may criticize Phan for an overtly melodramatic reading, his performance was powerful and highly expressive. The production was fully under Rilling's control. His technical skill in conducting the entire work from memory was awe-inspiring, and his sure-handed ability to pace the unfolding drama made this performance unforgettable. In addition, Rilling's interpretation was prime evidence for his assertion that a conductor should lead the entire work, recitatives and all.

Rilling is an anomaly among Bach conductors. In addition to conducting the recitatives he uses modern instruments and large choral forces. In some circles he may be considered as "blasphemous" as Ormandy, but this would be completely without merit. His intellect and musicality are beyond reproach, his use of conventional forces is reasoned and he has written extensively on it, his performances are emotionally satisfying, and his commitment to education is unparalleled.

During the life of the Oregon Bach Festival more than a thousand conductors have attended the master class in conducting. Rilling called the festival the "fifth child" of co-founder Royce Saltzman; it is also Rilling's child. Both of their legacies will live on as this plethora of conductors, their metaphoric grandchildren, spreads the wisdom of Rilling from generation to generation. Next summer will focus on Bach's *St. John Passion*, the first major work performed at the festival in 1971. There is sure to be another bumper crop of applicants, and it is without question that the 2013 season, Rilling's last as artistic director, will be an emotional celebration of his passion, wisdom, wit and generosity.

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Russian Reflections

The Ninth International Festival of Choral Art, “The Singing World.”

July 29–August 3, 2011, St. Petersburg, Russia.

An enticing ChoralNet announcement appeared in January 2011 for St. Petersburg’s Ninth International Festival of Choral Art, “The Singing World,” and the Seventh Yury Falik International Contest of Choral and Vocal Ensembles. The Festival’s website showed an average of thirty choirs participating from all over the world, but the majority were from the Russian Federation. As a specialist in Russian choral music, I considered attending the Festival a wonderful opportunity to see and hear the current trends in Russian choral singing by ensembles coming from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Tomsk, Veliky Novgorod, Kursk, Sarov, Vladivostok and more.

A new trip to Russia however, stirred up much apprehension. My last visit was in the early 1990’s when a few unregulated, entrepreneurial “businessmen” had arranged a “subsidized” tour for my New York Chamber Choir to sing in Moscow and appear in St. Petersburg’s prestigious White Nights Festival. Communism had recently collapsed, and many of the artists the state had previously supported were literally starving. Crime was rampant, and unbeknownst to me these “businessmen” expected to be paid back immediately upon our arrival and refused to let us move forward with the tour until they were given money on the spot. After much negotiating and cajoling they allowed us to move forward without paying, as long as we agreed to sponsor a similar group in New York City later in the year. My position as Director of Choral Activities at New York University at the time afforded me the opportunity to see this through, and so we ended up sponsoring a tour by a group from the St. Petersburg Opera Company. The experience however, made me fearful and mistrustful of ever returning to Russia.

Almost twenty years later I now felt compelled to attend the St. Petersburg Festival, but I was not willing to risk a similar experience until I saw for myself that the organizers were trustworthy and the Festival legitimate. I contacted the coordinators to ask about opportunities to observe, and to my surprise they asked me to become a participant and provide a workshop in African-American spirituals; I would be given three choirs to work with as well as housing and an honorarium! Thrilling prospect as this was, my old apprehensions were ever-present. This time however, e-mail provided immediate answers from

the Festival administrators addressing all my concerns. In the early 1990’s, unless I made an expensive phone call, I had to wait weeks to hear from anyone connected with our choir tour. Now, my fears were dispelled sometimes within minutes.

From the moment I stepped off the plane in July 2011 I saw a completely changed country. Twenty-four-hour “big box” stores and supermarkets were everywhere. Much like in the United States (fortunately or unfortunately) one could now buy anything at any time. The highly vibrant city was bursting with energetic youth gathering at coffee houses and sushi bars everywhere, and the Festival proved no different. It seemed to me that the presenters—a music festival company and a tour company—spared no expense in making this enormous undertaking run as smoothly as possible. It also appeared as if the Festival had significant local government backing because of its international importance.

Over the six days of the Festival, seventeen choral concerts took place in St. Petersburg. Every concert was free to the public and at each venue one had to arrive early to ensure a seat. All of the Festival activities were presented in both Russian and English. Concerts were held at such historically important places as the St. Petersburg State Capella, Oranienbaum (the Russian royal residence), the St. Peter and Paul and Kazan Cathedrals, and the Alexander Nevsky Monastery. I also observed several days of the Yuri Falik International Contest of Choral and Vocal Ensembles that was held within the framework of the Festival, and which had twenty-five ensembles participating in nine categories. The international jury consisted of renowned choral conductors and composers from Russia, France, Italy, Latvia and Estonia.

The Festival also included master classes with several conductors from Russia, and one each from France, Sweden, Latvia and the United States who directed the participating choirs in the styles of their various countries. The singers in the classes were chosen from the Festival’s choirs, who learned the music in advance and came prepared to sing with the conductors.

Almost more than my own workshop, I eagerly anticipated the chance to see Russian conductors work with native choirs on Russian music. From the opening ceremony showcasing all thirty-four Festival choirs, the exceptionally high level of choral singing struck me immediately, from the youngest children’s school choir to the most expert adult small ensemble.

The choirs were highly trained with the majority on a level approximately equal to most professional choirs from the United States. In particular, the capabilities of the Russian choirs were so distinguished that conductors from all over the world could learn an enormous amount about Russian singing style from their performances alone. The overall winners of the Falik competition were three choirs from the Beijing Philharmonic whose stellar technical proficiency won them top prizes in all categories.

Hearing Russian music sung in the places for which it was written, however, made the biggest impression. Immersion in the music of contemporary St. Petersburg composers in the State Capella, and eighteenth and nineteenth century sacred music in the cathedrals, seemed equivalent to what it must have been like to hear the Rachmaninoff *Vespers* for the first time—really breathtaking. Concerts in renovated churches (from church to public swimming hall, and back to church again) bore reminders of the seventy-five years that passed without an utterance of sacred music within their walls, and brought about overwhelming emotions with the knowledge of its long deprivation under the Soviet regime. The awareness of the sacrifices made by those who kept sacred music traditions in their hearts and minds all during this time was ever-present.

What next for the Festival? As its positive reputation grows, the organizers expect to attract an even more diverse participation of choirs from around the world. I would have no qualms about bringing a choir back to perform except to be a bit intimidated by the high expectations of the audiences. As a solo observer I know of no greater opportunity to hear such a concentration of high level Russian choral singing.

Andrea Goodman is director of the Cantilena Chamber Choir in Western Massachusetts, and the annual Saratoga Choral Festival. She has directed choirs at the New England Conservatory, Skidmore College and New York University. Appearances have included the Aspen Music Festival, and the Festival of White Nights in St. Petersburg, Russia.

State Symphony Cappella of Russia, Valeri Polyansky, conductor.

*October 27, 2011, Sage Chapel, Cornell University,
Ithaca, New York.*

In October 2011 American listeners had the chance to experience a great choral tradition in the process of reviving, developing and simultaneously opening to the world fully for the first time. Valeri Polyansky led the State Symphony Cappella of Russia on a tour of the eastern United States, stretching from Michigan, Ohio and New York State to Georgia and Florida. This fifty-voice unaccompanied professional ensemble has represented state-of-the-art choral singing in Russia for many years through touring and recording a wide variety of traditional and contemporary repertoire. Many singers were clearly in their forties, fifties and sixties, and long-standing members of the choir. The repertoire consisted of sacred works of Bortniansky, Tchaikovsky, Grechanninov, Rachmaninoff, Kitka, Bruckner, and Schnittke, as well as secular music of Taneyev, Brahms and Falla, with the obligatory Russian folksongs as encores.

What are some of the elements of this tradition as it is currently practiced? One heard a consistent rich and resonant sound, supported by a seemingly endless reservoir of breath. It was easy to see the continuous process of choral breathing, with every individual committed to frequent “tanking up” mid-phrase to create the illusion of an enormous sound-machine. Balance on the many extended chords was excellent; here were large professional voices singing freely, yet still working superbly as a team. More surprising was the constant use of subtle expressive rhythmic and dynamic inflections stemming from the declamation patterns of the language. Stronger syllables were almost always slightly lengthened; no measure seemed to stay truly within the same tempo, and yet none seemed radically distorted. The liturgical music that can look rather plain and straightforward on the page came to life through this constant inflection of time, dynamics, and tonal color. The effect combined freedom and calculated precision in a unique way.

Recordings of Russian choirs of the Soviet era display a frequent noticeable scooping from below the pitch at the beginning of phrases, as well as at the peaks of phrases. This “expressive use of pitch” was not in evidence with this choir, although many of these same singers doubtless sang on those recordings. The intonation was much more in line with a Western concept of “in tune,” although far from flawless. The overall intonation seemed often sacrificed to the cause of richness of sound—basses descending to the bottom of the staff and below enriched their resonance as they went slightly under pitch. At the

opposite end of the spectrum, sopranos cresting on the peak of a loud phrase also invariably pushed the sound slightly below pitch, although the timbre itself never showed signs of steely harshness that is sometimes heard among the second rank of Slavic operatic sopranos.

It was to be expected that the choir might seem less at home in the non-Russian repertoire. Unfortunately the Brahms *Lieder und Romanzen*, Op. 93a lacked any sense of the charm, humor, and romance inherent in the texts. Heaviness and seriousness reigned. Falla's rarely heard *Balada de Mallorca* was an even more remote choice, but it fared better, and seemed almost to evoke a dance-like Spanish atmosphere.

Polyansky's conducting provided an exaggerated example of an ensemble's sound arriving long after the visual stopping of the beat, as is occasionally seen with European orchestras. Mostly entries were together, as with any well-disciplined ensemble, but it was impossible to see how the chorus managed

this feat. The answer must be through many hours of rehearsal of this repertoire, perfecting some unseen sense of the interval of delay between gesture and sound. Although he had great control of nuance in the Russian music, one felt that all the subtle effects had been worked out carefully many rehearsals ago.

Overall, the concert provided a valuable glimpse of one of the world's central choral traditions. In what this choir does well it is possibly unmatched by any other ensemble, and the concert at Cornell almost matched the level of its recordings in many ways. One has to admire its forays outside of its central repertoire, but even more to be admired is its leadership in the revival of the greatest Russian sacred repertoire.

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