

A History of the Chorus

BEGINNINGS

The singers assembled for the first time on a cold Monday evening in January 1968. They would rehearse weekly in a small storefront room at the improbable address of 5619 1/2 University Way NE. Peter Seibert, music director at the Lakeside School, had invited friends and friends of friends from the Seattle area to audition for a new community chorus. He would direct it as a staff member of The New School for Music, a spinoff enterprise, like the Yamaha Music School next door, of the nearby Broberg Music Store.

Twenty-eight singers survived the audition and paid each \$10 "tuition" and \$3.17 for music. Thus began *"The New School Chamber Chorus."* By May of that first season they had polished a program of short pieces — Schutz, Josquin, Morley, Hindemith, and the Brahms Liebeslieder Waltzes — and performed them twice in Bellevue and twice in Seattle.

The chorus took three more seasons to grow firm roots and to establish for itself a sense of independence, direction, and commitment. It was performing on an incredibly busy schedule. With a repertory ranging from Stravinsky and Bach to a montage of ditties "Parisienne" by the composer whom some members dubbed Jack Offalbach, it performed four to eight times each year to audiences bewildering in their size, affinities, and locations, including an appearance, one dismally rainy day, in Vancouver, B.C. "Have Gown, Will Travel" was what Richard Boone's TV character Paladin might have urged the women singers to adopt as their slogan.

In four years the group had grown to nearly forty members, but yearly turnover of singers averaged 40%, and yearly budgets barely topped \$1200. Meanwhile the New School went out of business. Peter Seibert and his singers then selected a governing board (Dina Myers, president) and in 1971 reorganized themselves as the Northwest Chamber Chorus.

But in the spring of that year the chorus had to confront a crisis of identity more basic than choosing a name. Weary from four years of "managing" the NWCC as well as conducting it, Peter announced that he was bowing out. He cited the press of other duties and his increasing resolve to focus his energies on early instrumental and recorder music, but he asserted also that — for the chorus — it was "time for new blood."

The board put the issue squarely to the members. If they wished to continue as a chorus, they had two choices. They could remain what they had become: competent to perform small works for their own pleasure before small audiences of one's own families and friends, with a tiny budget, no pay for the director, and the likelihood that the level of performance, now on a plateau, would soon decline. Or — they could search for a first-class director, offer him or her a reasonable stipend, and strive for better programs, more exacting performances, a new level of audience, and especially a degree of voluntary management that would help make all of this possible and the director's life bearable.

The response to this honest self-scrutiny was historic. The members readily chose the more challenging of the two paths open to them, considered several candidates for director, and finally selected one of their members as top choice. She was Joan Catoni, an alto with a warm unerring voice and a perfect sense of pitch, also a doctoral student in choral conducting in the UW School of Music, soon to become music director at Lakeside Middle School, and, not least, shortly to marry Frank Conlon. For the next twenty-four years Joan

Conlon would bring to her task consummate musicianship and a reassuring sensitivity to the problems inherent in the new direction she and the chorus had set for themselves.

CONSOLIDATION

For Joan Conlon's first two seasons (1971-73), inevitably a time of high turnover, a core of twenty "old" members helped to establish continuity. They included, besides Dina, those other steadfast altos Wendy Shelton (now Roedell), Heide Rudolph, Jean Leik, and Mary Hornstein, accompanist; and also Patricia Midtskog, Otis Pease, Rush Chase, and Frank Conlon. Joining them were thirty new members, including Trish Merrill, Molly West (now Vandekieft), and Tom Hankins, many of whom Joan personally selected and recruited. They could rehearse in the music room of the Lakeside Middle School, then located next door to St. Mark's Cathedral, and they were to use this facility for the next ten years.

The NWCC offered musical fare featuring Sweelinck ("*Cantate Domino*"), Praetorius, Bach ("*Lobet den Herrn*"), Mozart, Brahms, Debussy, Distler, and Bartok, pieces generally a cappella or with piano. It also acquired, at last, status as a non-profit tax-exempt educational enterprise. Over the next four seasons, as the interest and loyalty of the chorus members and their audience grew, so did budgets, and, in turn, so did the director's plans for more ambitious programs. Chorus size steadied at about 40 singers, yearly turnover dropped to 16%, and the group was ready and eager to venture where Joan Conlon was leading them.

Two Haydn Masses and two Telemann cantatas, as well as full programs of Monteverdi, Purcell, and Britten, required expert instrumentalists and meticulous choral preparation. (Performing the St. Nicholas Mass three times in two days in late 1974 set a chorus record that still stands...) For the first and only time in its history the chorus joined the Seattle Symphony Orchestra and its Chorale in early 1977 for two performances of the Orff Carmina Burana.

In the midst of these achievements Joan Conlon's professional career passed an important milestone. In 1973, in 'partial fulfillment' of her candidacy for the doctorate in music, she conducted the chorus at UW in a program of pieces ranging from Monteverdi to Dvorak (the latter in Czech). Two years later she earned that degree after completing her dissertation on Telemann, and in 1976 she joined the UW music faculty as assistant professor.

In ten seasons the chorus had completed 17 full programs of music and had performed 50 concerts in 33 different places. Yet its musical reach continued to exceed its financial and managerial grasp. As standards of performance rose, the departure of an unusual number of members from 1977 through 1980 (a few who seemed to have developed differing goals for the chorus) permitted Joan to recruit at least 50 newcomers, exceptionally musical to be sure, but many with pronounced organizational talents, and time would reveal how devoted they were to serving the chorus as well as singing in it. Joining Jean Leik, Trish Merrill, Molly West (Vandekieft), Frank Conlon, and Otis Pease in positions of influence were Laura and Mike Hooning, Donna McCampbell, Steve Tanimoto, Susan Jenkins, Steve Whitner, Ken Abrahamsen, Elaine Koga, Doug Newland, Leslie Starr, John Peterson, Eileen Marra, Kit Adams, and Frank Trujillo. This was the moment when the NWCC first broke through to a level of competence in management that would soon enable it to gain renown for high-quality choral music in the local community.

BREAKTHROUGH

Artistry

Let's look carefully at what the chorus members were doing in the four critical seasons 1978 through 1981, not only on the surface of performance but below it. They presented major works by Palestrina, Schein, Pergolesi, Handel, J.C.Bach, Brahms, Arnold Mendelssohn, and a score of shorter pieces, all with little or no orchestration. The NWCC appeared by invitation at its first regional ACDA convention (eventually it would attend two more), involving an early spring bus trip to Spokane in 1980.

By the end of Joan's tenth season, in June 1981, the chorus was experienced and talented enough to present a landmark concert: in one evening the five Telemann choral cantatas which Joan herself had unearthed in Europe, unpublished and apparently unperformed since Telemann's day. This was the first truly "*banner*" event in its history. Over 600 persons attended, a record which still holds for a single performance. The soloists and instrumentalists were for the first time professional and paid close to "scale," the performance was virtually a world "premiere," and both chorus and director earned their first knowledgeable and strongly favorable review. Many concert-goers chose, for a small fee, to heighten their understanding of the performance by attending a series of university lectures (by Joan Conlon and Tom Hankins among others) on 18th-century German culture, art and music, and on Telemann's life and career.

What contributed especially to the quality of the evening was the long and grueling chorus preparation: At least once during the five preceding seasons the NWCC had rehearsed and premiered all five cantatas. Indeed, by the end of this Telemann marathon the chorus was only too eager to fete Joan with a merciless Frank Trujillo / Willis Konick send-up to *The Sound of Music*, with lyrics that featured a Princess Catoni madly obsessed with articulating a string of nearly unpronounceable Telemannic German phrases. And no one appreciated more than did NWCC members a *New Yorker* cartoon that year — the tricentenary of the composer's birth — featuring the entrance to a concert hall from which emerges a glazed-eyed grumpy concert-goer, past a poster announcing the evening's program: "All the Georg Philipp Telemann you can stand."

Funding, Management

But the true significance of the chorus's breakthrough by June 1981 may be understood only by linking its artistic achievements with some crucial events underlying them. Through most of the 1970s, annual funding had hovered between \$1500 and \$3000, producing only a tiny reserve that actually disappeared for a year after the chorus invested in concert dresses for the women. Then from 1979 through 1983 annual budgets soared precipitously to \$20,000 and generated in turn a savings reserve of \$5000. (To move ahead of our story: After 1984 neither budgets nor reserves would ever retreat below those figures. Budgets leveled off for a few years and then grew moderately through the '90's. The chorus reserve funds soared to \$20,000 by 1990 before retreating to the present level of \$10,000.)

Four activities produced this five-year burst of funding:

- Income from dues increased 50% (to \$1700) after the director expanded the chorus from 40 to 48 and the board raised individual dues.
- Revenue from ticket sales leaped from a yearly average of \$1200 in the mid-1970's to \$5500 in the mid-1980's (alternating, as we shall explain, between \$6300 in odd years and \$4700 in even ones).

- The advent of Pennillion performances (paid for with a King County grant) and the annual University Bookstore caroling gig in 1981 raised fees paid to the NWCC for special performances from less than \$100 to over \$1400 annually.
- Up through 1980 charitable donations from friends or members of the chorus had fluctuated yearly from none at all to \$1000, averaging \$300. 1981 was the first year of a sustained and systematic effort by the fund-raising board member (Otis Pease) and the director to solicit gifts or grants from individuals, corporations, foundations and public agencies. Results: \$2600 from 27 sources; in the following year a like amount from 40 persons or agencies; and in 1983, from 81 sources, \$9000.

[The dollar figures for the 1976-1982 period overstate the chorus's growth in real income because the U.S. experienced a relatively high 10% annual inflation rate in those years. Since the mid-'80's, inflation has ceased to be important.]

Even discounting for inflation, this dramatic increase in the NWCC's annual resources, the result of deliberate purpose and strategy, enabled the chorus to engage in activities previously unaffordable but now necessary if it were to take its musical programs to a new level. In 1980 the vigorous leadership of Trish Merrill, board president, focused unprecedented board attention on concert management and publicity.

Trish assisted Joan in structuring relations with larger groups of instrumentalists and soloists so as to permit the chorus to perform for the first time really major works and to pay union scale. Donna McCampbell, with the advice and help of Susan Korey from the Seattle community's Business Volunteers for the Arts, supervised a substantial program of publicity. Dawn Drake, another BVA volunteer, helped introduce the concept and activity of long-range planning; and Susan Jenkins undertook to write grant proposals. Donna also established a mailing list, created posters, placed ads and radio announcements, helped arrange for university lectures that would tie into concert programs, and worked with graphics designer Katha Dalton to improve printed programs and with Rob Kemp and Iskra Johnson to create a chorus logo. The logo would soon win first prize for its quality in a city-wide contest and to this day has remained the most distinctive visual symbol of the NWCC.

The logo also surely more than compensated for one of the more puzzling chorus efforts to burnish its image. Presumably to prevent strangers from thinking of the NWCC as merely an adjunct to the fine small recently established NWCO (Northwest Chamber Orchestra), the chorus voted in 1980 to add "Pacific" to its name — with what results nobody has been able to determine. (In 1997 the chorus voted to delete the extra word: PNWCC has again become NWCC, leaving not a trace of this once critical gesture of identity except a single Washington State vanity plate with an unwanted P.)

To return to the larger story, the significance of this turning-point season of 1980-1981 lies in the critical interaction of new chorus goals and new means. Each fed the other. An initial surge in income in 1979 (due mostly to one major gift) plus caution in concert spending in 1979 and 1980, allowed the board to build up a \$3000 cash reserve on which to base the Telemann venture. The fund-raising of 1981 made possible a significant concert budget and, even more important, for a publicity campaign unprecedented for the chorus. Attendance and ticket income, plus favorable reviews and enthusiastic audiences, now made it possible and desirable to plan a still larger and musically more striking set of programs of even higher quality, not just one at a time but over a span of several seasons.

The PNWCC had achieved a major breakthrough, in musical creativity, in financial boldness, in managerial sophistication, and in operations designed to create a community image for itself. The director and her singers had taken Telemann about as far as any choral group

could. Now which composer, what music, might they choose to enable and inspire them to reach greatness? The answer seemed almost self-evident.

PEAKS OF EXCELLENCE

A Passion for Bach

While still focused on Telemann Joan Conlon had been planning, in at least a five-year sequence, programs of the major choral works of J. S. Bach, and in 1982 she and the board set out to do it. It was to center on the B-minor Mass at the tricentennial of Bach's birth (1985), to begin with the St. Matthew Passion (1983), and, initially, to end with the St. John Passion, spaced to allow for less costly works —by Bach and others— in intervening years to provide financial breathing room and perhaps emotional relief.

Joan had long been determined to contribute something unique to the Seattle music world. Her plan was to prepare each work once in the cycle, for one or two performances each, and to settle for nothing less than the most electrifying possible quality and with the most meticulous possible attention to detail.

Conceptually the St. Matthew Passion was to prove the most daring, ironically because Joan conservatively wished to restore the same relationship between the musical drama and its audience as had existed in Bach's day. Bach's audience would have heard the Passion story in a familiar German translation of the original biblical text and were also invited to sing in their own language the equally familiar chorales. The PNWCC audience in 1983 likewise was to hear the biblical text in their own language— English— and to join in singing a number of the chorales, likewise in English. The arias and some of the chorus numbers, however (notably those which open and close the Passion), Bach composed for verses that the poet Picander had written in German, and Joan kept them in German.

This bold mixture of German and English in 1983 for the most part worked well. The audience seemed especially enthusiastic about joining the chorus in singing chorales in English, and Joan was to continue that practice in the Christmas Oratorio and the St. John Passion a few years later, with striking effect. Singing the biblical text in English, however, raised frequent difficulties in fitting words to music, which was mainly why some purists objected to it and why she later chose to leave the biblical portions of the Oratorio and the St. John Passion in German.

Still, for the St. Matthew performance, finding that much of the available English translations seemed awkward or dramatically inadequate, the chorus creatively sought better ones. In Bach's version of the biblical German, for example, the crowd, asked what they thought should be done to Jesus, shouts "Er ist des Todes schuldig!" The Barenreiter score of the Passion translates this as "Of death this man is guilty!" The phrase fits the eight musical lines that Bach interwove for the German version, but the translation weakens it with a poetic inversion that one can hardly believe an angry crowd would ever shout.

Moreover, what does the phrase mean? In ordinary English it makes no sense. Chorus members worked hard on this question. "He is of death deserving"? The meaning is clearer, the words fit the music, but the phrase is still dramatically improbable. "This man deserves to perish"? Closer, but still too literary. How about "He must be put to death!"? Emotionally perfect, but one syllable short, unless one awkwardly extends the word "death" across

several notes. What the chorus finally sang, dramatically stretching out "guilty" with more powerful effect, was, simply, "This man is guilty!".

In the end what counted most was the power of the production as a whole, bringing together a chorus, temporarily enlarged, divided in two and joined by the Northwest Boychoir, instrumentalists mainly from the Northwest Chamber Orchestra, and five soloists of regional and national distinction. Soprano Montserrat Alavedra transfixed the audience with the color, purity, and elegance of her tone and an exquisite understanding of the music.

Central to the success of the performance was the musical subtlety and dramatic power that Joan had instilled in the chorus over months of preparation and then drew out of them in one evening. Frank Corrado, an accomplished actor, writing as music critic from the *Seattle Weekly*, described incisively how this musicianship showed itself in the chorus's rendering of the single word "Barabbas!" to answer Pilate's question, should Barabbas or Jesus be set free? "The attack on the word's first syllable," Corrado wrote, was made, as it had to be, "with razor-sharp precision at a tremendous dynamic level, and then followed by two similarly perfect, equally weighted, attacks on the remaining syllables." A few seconds, and it was over, but the effect was hair-raising. It left him, he said, "moved to tears."

Bach Cycle

When Joan Conlon took a long-awaited academic leave in 1983-84, the chorus chose as her replacement Ken DeJong, music director of the First Presbyterian Church. Ken's first task was to prepare the chorus to sing the Bach Mass in G-minor under Alun Francis as a part of the Northwest Chamber Orchestra's regular season. Four months later as a part of its own season the PNWCC offered the incredibly demanding Bach Motet III, "Jesu Meine Freude," sung without accompaniment. Ken's meticulous rehearsing assured its artistic success, while the PNWCC's concert strategy greatly reduced the cost of instrumentalists for the year and allowed Joan, on her return from leave, to start preparations for the B-minor Mass with a \$5000 reserve.

Producing the Passion only two years earlier made the Mass in many ways easier to do. The Northwest Chamber Orchestra and four of the five vocal soloists — Montserrat Alavedra, Bruce Browne, Louise Marley, and Timothy Mussard — were available again, as was the First United Methodist Church. Latin was easier to sing than German, and many singers thought the music less taxing, though more complex. Two thirds of the choristers in the Mass had performed in the Passion. Among the newest members who sang in both were Miriam Espeseth, Barbara Broderick, Kris Moore, Mark Hudson, A.J. Newland, and Doug Howard.

The B-minor Mass was performed in mid-May 1985 and cost the PNWCC \$12,500 to produce, a little more than had the Passion, but one substantial reward to the chorus from the Mass was that the American Guild of Organists (Northwest) had contracted with the PNWCC for a repeat performance six weeks later, in early July, to culminate a four-day Seattle convention, resulting in substantial savings over what the PNWCC would normally have had to pay for two performances. The Passion had attracted a single audience of 550, while the Mass reached a combined audience of over 800, and the prestigious AGO invitation enhanced the chorus's visibility and reputation.

In 1985-86 the chorus turned its attention to Handel and Brahms and again reduced its expenses, but it also continued the Bach cycle with the motet "Singet den Herrn." Joan scheduled the "Christmas Oratorio" for the December concert in 1986, the cantata "Wachet

Auf" the following spring, and the "St. John Passion" a year later. Finally, at the invitation of the NWCO, in the winter of 1990 members of the chorus performed the "Magnificat" under Eric Shumsky as a part of their season, bringing the Bach era to an end.

For the "Oratorio" Joan again employed members of the NWCO, paid to scale, and for two choral numbers engaged members of the Northwest Girl Choir. (Among the newcomers to the PNWCC in the mid-1980's were Kathy Bauck— soon to be Kathy Young, Jean Feagin, and John Lee.) Soloist Bruce Browne, veteran from the Mass and the St. Matthew, again performed as evangelist, Emilie Berendsen-Bloch and Greg Abbott sang solos, and when Montserrat Alavedra's health did not permit her to appear, Valerie Yockey took her place.

For the "St. John" (spring, 1988) NWCO players were once more on hand, bass-baritone Greg Abbott appeared with Thomas Goleeke (evangelist), Daniel Arthun, and Louise Marley; and Montserrat Alavedra returned to sing the two soprano arias with a depth of color and passion that no one who heard her that weekend will ever forget.

It would be Montserrat's last performance with the chorus. Three years later, after a long illness, she succumbed to cancer. Remembering that performance, one chorister later remarked on her courage and love, amid such pain, in pushing her voice to its limits in order so perfectly to express and transform the Passion. Kit Adams, noting her selfless interest in others, recalled leading the chorus offstage at the end of the St. Matthew concert, leading them past where she stood, so radiant and "so gorgeous," he said, that "my knees went weak." He was about to tell her how beautifully she sang and "how grateful we all were for having her sing with us." But, smiling straight into his eyes, she spoke first. "Bravo!" she said, to him — to him!, and thus to the entire chorus.

Public reception of the Oratorio and the St. John was hard to evaluate. The Oratorio attracted the chorus's largest audience (and still a record today): two performances totaled nearly 900 listeners, their numbers and enthusiasm reflecting in part, of course, the unique popularity of Christmas season productions. The two performances of the St. John Passion, in contrast, drew a total audience of only 350, a considerable disappointment to the performers and their director. Unaccountably, the press failed to review either program. Was the public losing interest in the landmarks of Baroque music? Answers were uncertain and have remained so.

Yet the chamber chorus believed, with some reason, that the full Bach cycle had achieved Joan Conlon's original goals: electrifying, top-quality performances of programs offered only once in several years after extensive artistic preparation, constituting an unmistakable sign of the chorus's musical and organizational maturity.

Remarkably, even though the Oratorio and the St. John each cost over \$13,000 (each program was performed twice), PNWCC finances supported a steadily growing cash reserve all through this unprecedentedly expensive cycle. Indeed, by its end the reserve topped \$12,000, independently of the chorus's largest-ever single gift, \$10,000 in 1987 from the family of A.J. and Doug Newland. The director and her singers would hope to turn their success into creative efforts to present compelling and truly excellent choral performance.

Choral-Dance-Drama

Working with Seattle's Spectrum Dance Company in 1984, Ken DeJong and the PNWCC performed a concert unique in its history and about as creative as most singers ever get in

merging choral pieces with dance performance. It featured Benjamin Britten's "Choral Dances from 'Gloriana'" and "Rejoice in the Lamb" with original choreography, costumes, lighting, and backdrops of slides. The Lamb had never before been set to dance. Ken also featured Brahms's "Neue Liebeslieder" waltzes with pianists Elaine Koga and Mary Hornstein, and filled out the program with appropriate choral dances from Handel, Morley, and Purcell.

Alas, no one reviewed the concert, but to defray the cost of the dancers the chorus obtained grants from both the King County and the Seattle arts commissions, not only reducing its own outlay to \$4400 but demonstrating a significant public recognition of the appeal and the artistic merits of this production. The dance performance merged the abstract with the representational and ballet with modern movement. In Gloriana the dancers faced an unfamiliar task in having to dance to live and a cappella choral singing. At its best— in the Lamb— the revelation in dance of the poetry of the music was brilliant and inspiring, and throughout the evening dancers, singers— and especially their conductor — blended dramatic seriousness with elegant grace and playful humor. Ken DeJong apparently enjoyed his experience with the chorus so much that he subsequently founded the Bellevue Chamber Chorus and attracted to it a few PNWCC members resident on the east side.

Six years later, at the end of the Bach cycle, Joan Conlon scheduled an equally bold rendition of musical elements, in this case one that the composer himself had constructed. Igor Stravinsky's "Les Noces" (The Wedding), conceived as a ballet and composed in the driving spirit of a dance, combined traditional Russian folk songs and choral commentary, solo recitatives, a large percussion section, and four pianists playing four pianos. Stravinsky's inventiveness with rhythm, musical color, and folk rhetoric created an impressionistic tone painting of extraordinary musical complexity.

The program was a concert performance and did not attempt to offer dancing. The chorus and soloists (among them Janeanne Houston and Daniel Arthun) sang in English, but the interaction of words, tone, and a fragmented 7/8 beat proved as taxing as anything the ensemble— including the director— had ever done. This probably helps explain why, even without the dancing, "Les Noces" has been rarely performed.

Joan had chosen her musicians with exceeding care (Elaine Koga was one of the pianists), and she ingeniously paired Haydn's "Lord Nelson Mass" (1798) with "Les Noces" (1923) to provide a striking and welcome mutual contrast in tone, harmony, color, and occasion (the Mass was originally titled to suggest the theme of difficult, dangerous times of war). The concert took place in Roethke Auditorium on the UW campus. Considering the musical achievement, the award of two public grants, and the chorus's record-high reserve fund available to make it all happen, the total cost of the single performance — \$14,000, the largest outlay for a concert in the chorus's history — seemed uniquely worthwhile.

Joan was later to judge this concert at the end of the 1980's, along with the Telemann concert at the beginning, as the two most important landmarks in the musical growth of the chorus under her leadership. Douglas McLennan's exceedingly strong review in the P.I. offered evidence of what Joan may have had in mind. For Les Noces, he wrote, she had managed to create a chorus capable of more than nuance and subtlety. It was a chorus "fully aware of the lines and connective tissue that run through the music." She led them to see with her conducting "the overall shape of the performance," and in consequence their singing "radiated structural integrity and emotional intensity." It would be hard to state more clearly the director's goals for the PNWCC in those years.

Following the Haydn/Stravinsky concert Joan Conlon took a two-year leave of absence from the chorus, which then selected Bob Scandrett, a seasoned and veteran choral director and teacher, to lead them. (George Riley is the only current chorus member to have joined in those two years.) For the final concert of his tenure Bob directed Gian Carlo Menotti's "The Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore," a madrigal-fable, according to the composer, who also wrote the story, about the place of a poet in modern "civilization," featuring dancers representing the three mythical beasts, the poet, the Count, the townsfolk, a chorus which narrates and comments on the story, and a nine-piece chamber orchestra.

The PNWCC utilized the talents of choreographers and dancers from Co-Motion Dance, Whistlestop Dance, and Kaleidoscope and, as on most previous occasions, instrumentalists from NWCO. Co-Motion designed striking costumes, the dancing was inventive, and Joseph Anderson, from the chorus, wrote a deeply thoughtful program note on the meaning and significance of Menotti's work in this piece. Attendance exceeded 400, but no reviewer appeared. The performance cost \$9600, of which half came from reserves; it had attracted no grants. But there seemed to be general agreement in the chorus that they had gained much from Bob Scandrett's creative decision to perform this brilliant and oddly appealing choral drama by a "mini-operatic" composer whose short frenetic burst of popularity ("The Consul," "The Medium," "Amahl,") may have contributed to a failure of modern scholars to value Menotti's imaginative yet rigorous talent for serious musical drama.

One year later, upon her return to the chorus Joan Conlon put together a program which featured Darius Milhaud's imaginative choral drama "Les Choephores." It outstripped Stravinsky's "Les Noces" in the passion of its verses, though Stravinsky's dissonances and rhythms were more angular and complex. "Les Choephores" embodied not a wedding but incest, jealousy, betrayal, revenge, and murder— of and by brothers, sons, mothers, fathers, as set forth in Aeschylus's brutal, compelling Greek tragedy. The text was in French, as was the entire concert of works by Debussy, Faure, Poulenc, and Lili Boulanger. Michaela Gurevich sang the role of narrator, and an 11-member percussion ensemble played instruments ranging from hammer, ratchet, and cymbals to seven kinds of drum.

Lack of performance time and the complexity of the music restricted the chorus to only three movements out of Milhaud's seven, but the impact of such a dramatically passionate score and text was extraordinary. It created, as Philippa Kiraly put it in a review, "a riveting, rising tension of hissing, chanting, and rhythmic excitement," evoking the fury of spectators (the chorus) appalled by what they were witnessing.

The concert attracted, notably, a completely full house, two reviews, and a lengthy background piece by R.M. Campbell on the chorus's 25-year increasingly successful struggle to achieve excellence and to gain recognition for it. The chorus's strength that year and the next clearly reflected the presence of a dozen newcomers who survived Joan's auditions— among them Pamela Chang-Rice, Catharine Reid, Sherri Erickson, Rita Klinger, Alicia Lewis, Chris Gross, Jim Gordon, Pat Rice, and (for one year) Steve Demorest. Also notable were the budget figures for the 1992-93 season: for the first time in years, each concert drew in more revenue than it spent. "Debussy et Cie" with Milhaud, in particular, cost \$5200 to perform but earned \$6800, including grants from three public agencies.

Festive Seasons

From the time of its second season the chorus, like most other music-making organizations, drew its steadiest, if not always largest, audiences and ticket income at its annual Christmas concert. While not exactly a cash cow, that program often made enough money to permit

the director to take more risks with winter and spring programs. This was especially true through the 1970's and for most of the 1990's. During most of the Telemann-Bach-Stravinsky years of the 1980's, in contrast, all three programs each year tended to lose money, and it was mostly chorus dues, gifts to the chorus, and fees for special performances that made it possible to balance the books and create a reserve.

The widespread familiarity of music available for Christmas festivities may well provide the key to their relative success in attracting listeners and covering costs. Yet sheer quality counted too, especially the blend of virtuosity and inspiration found in the best smaller pieces traditionally suitable for Christmas. PNWCC Christmas programming for the most part avoided musical spectacles. In her 22 years of active directing, Joan Conlon scheduled for Christmas concerts only three major works involving orchestral ensembles: two Haydn masses in the mid-'70's, and the Bach Christmas Oratorio a decade later. They drew large audiences but did not cover their costs, and they tended to reduce, or shut out, the traditional fare which Christmas listeners appear to want over and over again.

On the other hand, small brass ensembles like Emerald City, Cascadia, and the Cathedral Brass made up for their cost with their tendency to excite audiences without distorting the programs' musical values, and the chorus scheduled them frequently. The Pinkham Christmas Cantata, the Pergolesi Mass, the Vaughan-Williams Festival Te Deum required only a few instrumentalists, and many other stirring and majestic seasonal pieces needed only an organist or pianist, or were performed a cappella. The Palestrina Missa Brevis, Bach's Singet den Herrn, Poulenc's Christmas Motets and Mass in G, are examples.

The staple fare for the chorus's Christmas seasons remained for years what it still now is, having survived five conductors: the short carol or motet with a traditional nativity or Mother-Child theme, usually composed or re-arranged, drawn from six centuries, and most commonly in English, German, Latin, Spanish, or French, though the chorus has also sung in Latvian. The favorites come from the works of Hassler, Gabrieli, Praetorius, Sweelinck, Brahms, Vaughan-Williams, Darke, Howells, Distler, Walton, Poston, Britten, Gardner, and Joubert. Both the chorus and its small ensembles (Pennillion and its successor Canzonetta) engage in frantic holiday schedules and have tended to favor the same pieces, though the small ensembles have usually enlivened the repertory.

One might suppose that the short carol, whether from folk origins or composed by professionals, would not offer the director much scope or inventiveness in programming, and he or she would be brash indeed to remove "Wassail" "Silent Night," or "We Wish You" from the Christmas line-up in order to let in a relative stranger. Yet for the Christmas 1990 concert Bob Scandrett boldly combined parts of Stravinsky's Mass, Isaac's Mass, and a "Hodie" by Poulenc to produce an inspired Christmas Mass with all of the needed elements, written more than 400 years apart.

Three years later Joan Conlon designed a series of familiar carols to be woven into Frank Corrado's narration of Dylan Thomas's "A Child's Christmas in Wales." The resulting performance offered an uncannily appropriate sequence of carols and story-telling, each enhancing the other. Repeated three more times, with improvements and some new carols each year, this production has now established itself as a chorus Christmas trademark.

Ensembles

At the 1980 Christmas concert — a sell-out performance at the Seattle Concert Theater — fans of the chorus heard for the first time a small vocal ensemble air four fairly secular

renaissance madrigals. Thus began an adjunct activity of major importance for the PNWCC itself and for its members. In surveys of chorus opinion the idea had frequently surfaced. Joan Conlon seized on it, made it happen, and it has lasted to this day.

That fall she had selected six singers talented and dedicated enough to form a group that could increase chorus income by auditioning for the prestigious King County Arts Commission arts touring program. KCAC would distribute to public schools and libraries a list of performing arts groups which it had accepted into the program. The schools and libraries in turn could invite any group they liked from the list to schedule a free public performance. They would pay the group a nominal fee, and KCAC would ultimately defray the remainder of the cost. It would be up to the performing group to present a 60-90 minute program congenial to the needs of the sponsoring school, library, or community center. This arrangement became the PNWCC's first-ever funding from a public agency.

The ensemble began with Molly West, Janet White, Trish Merrill, Donna McCampbell, Otis Pease, and John Peterson. Joan planned the music, rehearsed the ensemble and offered advice on performance but left the details and conduct of performances to its members. Winning a place on the KCAC list, the "small group" constructed a program of "songs from the age of Shakespeare," which earned them their first stipend from the Juanita High School, and a second from the Burien Library, appropriately on the Bard's birthday in April 1981. It also acquired Frank Trujillo's very considerable singing talents. From the beginning it agreed to donate all of its earnings to the chorus.

By the following Christmas they had made a second appearance with the chorus and had sung (for pay) at libraries in Des Moines and Bellevue. In March 1982 they offered a much expanded "Shakespeare" program as one of the chorus's two free Musik Abend concerts that season (see below), and in June they sang again with the full chorus in its spring concert. This "small ensemble" by then had reached several hundred listeners in five chorus sponsored venues and an additional two hundred in four appearances that earned for the chorus over \$1000.

In their third season Molly and Frank were no longer available, but fortunately the group was able to attract the formidable talents of Miriam Espeseth, Barbara Broderick, Leigh Anderson, and Mike Hooning. They successfully re-auditioned for the KCAC support program, performed for the Bothell library and again for the chorus Christmas concert, and were invited to appear in a UW School of Music "contemporary group" performance of the music of Peter Maxwell Davies. Under Joan's direction they sang three of Davies' "carols," a fiercely difficult task, but one they handled with the special elan of exceedingly well-trained amateurs confronting a prestigious audience of critical professionals.

Meanwhile they had thought up a name for themselves. Pennillion was a Welsh word signifying a form of competitive choral performance so complicated that it took several rehearsals simply to be able to illustrate to bewildered listeners what it was.

Presenting a program of "love songs from the British Isles" for the first of the chorus's new "Musik Abend" series in March 1983, and later for the cities of Bothell and Bellevue, Pennillion made collective use of everyone's talents, including Barbara's ballad singing, John's a cappella arrangements, Otis's commentaries, and the contributions of special guests such as Mike Weybright (dramatic reader), Philip Dickey and David Ohannesian (recorder players), and Peggy Monroe (percussionist). Perhaps to discourage themselves from thinking they were better than they were, the group applied to the Early Music Guild to

join a one-day master class that Paul Hillier offered during a Seattle visit. At once scary, exhilarating, and sobering, the experience provided a forceful lesson in perspective.

The years 1984 and 1985 proved a kind of climactic for Pennillion's ventures. In an outburst of creative energy its members, largely on their own, shaped three programs. "Sunlight and Shadow" uniquely illuminated with American songs a Henry Art Gallery exhibit of the paintings of William Merritt Chase, a much-celebrated late 19th-century New York artist. "An American Sampler" expanded that musical canvas to pursue the thread of folk and artsong traditions from Billings to Berlin (composers, not cities). "Love Songs Heavenly and Earthly" interwove the sacred and secular, with motet and madrigal renditions of similar texts and themes through seven hundred years of western music. Ken DeJong rehearsed and sang in the first two programs, and Joan Conlon rehearsed and advised on the third.

Pennillion also showed up at the Governor's Mansion in Olympia to perform for a meeting of a foundation dedicated to preserving the mansion, sang for a second time in the Des Moines and Bothell libraries, offered Christmas fare to the seasonal chorus concert and to the UW Faculty Club in 1984 and to Eastern Star Masonic auxiliary a year later. By 1986, as its engagements became more episodic its membership underwent increasing turnover, losing several key members but gaining, briefly, Laura Hooning, Erica Hamer, Doug Newland, Mike Summy, Georgia and Larry McRae, and, again, Frank Trujillo. It contributed Spanish renaissance songs to Tukwila and Kent and Christmas cheer to the Women's University Club, several retirement homes, and a number of private parties. When Donna and Otis arranged for the chorus to perform at their marriage reception in 1988, they specified that Pennillion offer a set of their favorite songs.

After the "valentine and lovers" program the next winter, participation in chorus concerts ceased, and — following an odd "gig" where it rehearsed and taped for a sizeable fee a three-part motet by (and for) a local Seattle composer — Pennillion soon lost its historic identity. Ad hoc ensembles of carol singers gathered and dispersed every December for charitable or fee-earning appearances, usually without benefit of Joan's rehearsing. In 1993-94 Pat and Pam Rice began to give shape to a more formal ensemble. It grew slowly, and soon after the advent of Steve Demorest as chorus director in 1996 it acquired the musical talents of John Lee and Frank Trujillo, agreed on a name — Canzonetta, re-enlisted Miriam (and temporarily two others from Pennillion days), developed a substantial schedule of paid and unpaid appearances, and so could be said to have re-incarnated the substance and the spirit of the small ensemble tradition begun many seasons before.

In the intervening years those ensembles earned over \$7000 for the chorus. Equally important for the quality of the experience of being a chorus member is the fact that about half the present chorus roster, and at least ten former choristers, have, sometime in the past 18 years, sung in public performances in well-organized, highly-trained small ensembles, where the art of choral singing encompasses a substantially different tradition.

Choral Lyrical Light

In the second half of its 30-year history the chorus began to program "fun." The vehicle was at hand: a German tradition of short "music evenings" before a small number of persons in informal settings suitable to "chamber" fare, perhaps with commentary to reduce the separation of listeners from performers. Heide Rudolph had called this "Musik Abend" format to Joan Conlon's attention, and in the late winter of 1982 the chorus presented what turned out to be the first two of seven, averaging one each year.

Pennillion, as has been noted, set the tradition by interspersing songs from Shakespeare's time with poetry readings and a thread of commentary, at once serious and light-hearted. The Wallingford United Methodist Church proved a congenial small setting; admission, open to the public, was free, though contributions were invited, the evening was a Sunday, and the performance took only an hour. A month later the full chorus offered, with Joan's commentary, some Poulenc and the formidable 5-part Mass by William Byrd. The difficult occasion of Byrd's composition was both somber and inspirational, and the music often joyous. In every major respect the performance reinforced the Pennillion format.

In 1983 the chorus featured the elegant flair and preposterous wit of Rossini's "Songs of My Old Age" and the second act of Gilbert & Sullivan's "Mikado." Bob Loper, actor, drama professor, and one-time chorus member, staged the latter as a concert piece, and Joan and Otis offered commentaries. With this performance the chorus shaped the Musik Abende into a vehicle for welcome winter entertainment, variously lyrical, comic, romantic, satirical, but always in the serious musical main stream. Pennillion presented British folk songs, and several years later the chorus under Bob Scandrett broadened the folk venue to include German and French. In 1985 Joan talked about Monteverdi in a choral presentation of "madrigali erotici" and, in the following year, about Handel's plagiarism (from others and from himself) as well as his genius in "Israel in Egypt." In 1987 Professor Larry Starr tied together with witty commentary a chorus offering of "Schumann, Schumann, and Schuman" (that is, Bob, Georg, and Bill).

At this point the chorus shifted its format while enlarging the program. To feature the valentine spirit of mid-February Joan scheduled five annual romantic turn-of-the-century bashes variously titled "Poets and Lovers," "Love Letters from Vienna," "Cupid O Cupid," and "Music Hall Extravaganza." Held in the Nippon Kan Theater, with an admission charge, the occasions were more "spectacle" and less "chamber," though they retained informal commentary.

Strauss, Herbert, Friml, Gershwin, parlor tunes, Civil War ballads, and Tin-Pan-Alley filled out the classical-romantic offerings of Mozart, Schubert, and Brahms. Ruth McGee and various chorus members acted out verses of longing and sentiment, and the "Music Hall" program — also billed as a fundraiser — furnished, besides an 1890's-style buffet dinner, a procession of talented choristers in songs, comic drama, and farcical send-ups suitable to the spirit of the era.

Two offerings stand out in retrospect. In 1993 Joan presented a concertized version of segments of "Porgy and Bess," featuring the solo work of Laird Thornton and Felicia Dobbs along with three choral numbers. Two years later she fashioned from five Gilbert & Sullivan operettas a full formal program entitled "Innocent Merriment." with choruses meticulously rehearsed in the G&S musical and dramatic style, with solos by Catherine Treadgold, Andrew Childs and William Darkow among others, and with orchestral accompaniment and ingenious and hilarious commentary by David Ross. (Singing in the chorus were three newcomers who have remained members to this day: Chris Willman and Jeff and Melissa Thirloway.) The two G&S performances exceeded by far the cost of any Musik Abend or Valentine offering, but, as it turned out, they came in the middle of Joan's last year with the chorus, and G&S seemed always to have occupied a special place in her thoughts. With it she left a crucial 15-year legacy of lyrical and comic entertainment to mix in with the chorus's principal fare.

In April 1995 Joan Conlon revealed that she was leaving the University of Washington to become a professor of choral music at the University of Colorado. She had grown increasingly dissatisfied with the state of her position at UW, and although she wanted desperately not to leave her home town, her alma mater and graduate school, her university position, and the chamber chorus, the conditions under which she worked in the Music School made irresistible the promise of the new career she was considering: a choral program of significantly better quality, stronger research and teaching support, and a significant boost in salary.

The chorus was stunned and dismayed but very supportive; and when subsequent negotiations fell through and Joan accepted the new position, most members felt, with some reason, resentment that the UW had failed to have done enough to keep her. In any case the chorus had no choice but to accept with sorrow her resignation as its director. In an overwhelming gesture of support, members undertook to raise the \$10,000 needed to produce the long-planned-for and first-ever chorus CD, based on its spring concert program to be directed by Joan herself. Contributions poured in from present and past members and from other close friends. Featuring gypsy music principally by Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Brahms, "The Romantic Gypsy" appeared in time for only the fourth Christmas concert that Joan had missed in over a quarter-century as chorus singer and director. It would help keep strong a bond of mutual memories.

Now facing its 28th season, the chorus proved that it had the savvy and the resources to survive such a loss and to go about filling Joan's shoes. The story really began in 1991, when the chorus board had made a wise choice to hire a part-time manager but an unwise selection of the person. Administrative mishaps and a fall-off in fundraising reached a point where the interim choral director generously returned his stipend in order to stem a steady drain on chorus reserves and budgets. Betsy Brockman, who had joined the chorus in 1988 as a singer with considerable experience in arts management, came to the rescue and offered to take over the new job.

The hiring of such a dedicated, energetic professional as Betsy permitted another breakthrough for the chorus comparable to what had taken place 12 years before. In a little over three seasons, by the time of Joan's departure, Betsy shored up the reserve fund, inspired and presided over a dramatic turn-around in ticket sales, gifts, grants, and fundraising activities, and so made it possible to fund her own salary as manager while bringing the yearly budget back into rough balance. Her work as manager for the first time in the chorus's history brought steady supervision and know-how to the increasingly complex tasks of publicity, mailings, contracts with musicians, relations with media, recording, rentals, keeping the books and arranging audits — and so freed up the board to concentrate on long-range policy, working with the director, and handling emergencies such as searching for a new director.

No less significant for this breakthrough were the talented volunteer leaders who emerged from the ranks along with Betsy since the mid-'80's to administer the chorus: newcomers like Mike Summy, Joel Haas, Ellen Buxton, Bob Schinske, Kathy Young, Alan Taylor, Alicia Lewis, Doug Howard, Kris Moore, Mark Hudson, AJ Newland, Pat Rice, Barbara Broderick, John Lee, Miriam Espeseth, and Rita Klinger, joining the veteran leaders of earlier campaigns.

The breakthrough came none too soon. Had it not occurred in 1992-95, it is questionable if PNWCC could have mounted a satisfactory search for a new director in 1995-96.

The board was immediately ready to go. Kit Adams, its seasoned president, appointed a committee to manage the search, to plan a strategy for "trying out" candidates, and to compose a statement of chorus philosophy and goals to discuss with them. Fortunately they could count on the prestige and respect for PNWCC's quality of music performance to attract fifteen candidates and so make it likely that three would emerge good enough to entrust with the chorus, each for one concert, during a "try-out" season. The committee readily agreed on a top three who were willing each to accept a three-month appointment to direct programs which were to some extent predetermined. Fred Lokken chose the Christmas concert, Steve Demorest the winter, and thus the Rachmaninoff Vespers, which Joan had already planned, and Roger Nelson agreed to spring, thus sharing a concert with Roupén Shakarian and the Philharmonia Northwest in a performance of the Mendelssohn "Lobgesang" choral symphony. Fortunately also this logistically complex and potentially hair-raising choral season worked practically without a hitch: all three concerts were deeply satisfying in different musical ways, and the board and the membership could finally agree on Steve Demorest. Steve was offered, and accepted, the permanent directorship, beginning with the 1996-97 season.

One is tempted to say how lucky PNWCC really was to have succeeded in the search. This historian, however, prefers to attribute the outcome to twenty years of evolving management and to the almost professional organizational skill of amateurs deeply loyal to their enterprise and dedicated to making music. Who could doubt, watching these critical events in the life of the chorus, that at last it was here to stay?

Steve Demorest, an assistant professor in the UW School of Music with a Master's degree from Westminster Choir College and a doctorate from Wisconsin, brought several years experience in training and directing choruses. He was familiar with the chorus and indeed had recently sung in it. (Added to the chorus roster in this period were six present members: Carol Berndt, Kathy Sankey, Adam Rauch, Bill Arndt, John McElheron, and Steve Shelton.) In his first five programs for NWCC audiences, Steve revealed a catholicity of tastes in styles and forms that matched the chorus's mature strengths and experience.

Rachmaninoff's "Vespers" possessed a familiar structure, the work of one composer consuming an entire program, but unlike, say, Bach's masses it relied on no instruments and displayed an idiom substantially unfamiliar in the chorus repertory. Steve's next two programs creatively centered on liturgical themes — "Hodie!" and "Credo" — common to the work of several composers widely separated in time but whose music, when juxtaposed, would reveal striking contrasts. These concerts also presented hauntingly moving works like Rutter's "*Gloria*," Lotti's "*Crucifixus*," and Part's "*Summa*," all new to the chorus. Like "Credo," Steve's "Basically Bernstein" was a masterpiece of inventiveness in its interweaving of the composer's infinite variety of forms and musical modes and brought to the repertory a completely neglected voice. Steve's most recent program included an unfamiliar and hauntingly beautiful Lauridsen piece interspersed with familiar chorus favorites and the ever popular "Child's Christmas" package.

Transitions almost by nature challenge traditions and threaten continuities. Yet the chorus transition of 1995-97 creatively linked the new with the old. "*Credo*" and "*Hodie!*" echoed the thematic structure of "*Zigeuner!*," the tribute to Bernstein recalled tributes to Telemann and to G&S, and Haydn's Mass in Time of War foreshadowed Mozart's Credo Mass in C. Possibly the two most dazzling gems in the chorus's musical jewelbox were the performances of the St. Matthew Passion and "Les Noces." If this thirty-year history offers a lesson, it is that performances analogous to those will take time. It took twelve seasons for Joan Conlon to produce the first, and eighteen for the second. But this same history

suggests also how much the chorus as an institution has developed along with its directors. The Steve Demorest era may grow faster than anyone suspects.

MILESTONES (1980+)

- Chorus's first overnight trip, 3/80. Destination: Spokane, with invitation to perform at the annual regional American Choral Directors Association conference. Outcome: Old-timers remember it as a defining moment in the chorus's growing sense of "community," beginning with Trish's intrepid and victorious showdown with a hotel front desk that had managed to "mislay" half of the room reservations...
- The Barry Manilow Caper, 8/81, or, how PNWCC earned a lot of bucks by exposing itself to comically crass humiliation, Seattle Coliseum (for vulgar details, ask chorus survivors)
- New rehearsal "home" Wallingford Methodist Church 9/81--6/82
- First three chorus retreats at Camp Indianola 10/81, 10/82, 10/83-- important defining experience in social cohesion, despite (or because of?) frontier living arrangements
- Women sang Debussy with Seattle Youth Orchestra, Opera House 11/81
- First (and so far only) participation in Ch 9 phonathon, members with chorus T-shirts to celebrate Telemann's 301st birthday 3/82
- One-day retreat at Pat Midtskog's home, 5/82-- continuing search for cohesion and "harmony" amid delightfully civilized surroundings
- PNWCC's (and Pennillion's) final performance in the old Seattle Concert Theater before its demolition 6/82
- Roast for JCC for achieving tenure at UW, 6/82-- suitably outrageous skits by the Pease-Peterson-Trujillo Trio, and others
- Summer outings at Pease cabin on Guemes Island, 7/82, 7/83, 7/84
- New rehearsal "home" at Greenlake Seventh Day Adventist Church 9/82--6/91
- First-ever published recording, "Christmas and Easter Choral Music," 10/83, featuring Palestrina, Byrd, Billings, and John Peterson.
- Retreats at Camp Huston 10/84--10/90, featuring workshops on vocal techniques with voice professionals like Chuck Peterson and Carmen Pelton, along with the chorus director. Consensus: Significant addition to the annual rite of non-stop rehearsing and socializing.
- PNWCC sang in UW School of Music fall concert 10/86.
- A.J. Newland became chorus librarian on Jean Leik's retirement 7/88
- Celebration of Pease/McCampbell marriage, including "The Good Morrow" by Gerald Kechley, written especially for the occasion and premiered by the chorus 2/88.

- ACDA NW conference, invited performance, Seattle 3/88.
- Bach cycle completed: summer outing at Newland home on Vashon, 7/88.
- Chorus sang at Gerald Kechley musical tribute 1/89
- Doug Newland died by accident at the chorus retreat, Camp Huston 10/89--chorus sang at his memorial service
- JCC and chorus end-of-year roast featuring the Demented Mezzos 6/90
- Retreat at Lutheran Bible Center, 10/91, St Thomas Center 10/92.
- Heide Rudolph became chorus librarian 7/92
- New "home" for rehearsals and meetings Greenlake United Methodist Church 9/92--6/97
- Jacques Faigenblum died of cancer 10/92. Chorus sang at his service
- Reunion of former chorus members at 25th anniversary concert 12/92.
- First "gala" fundraiser-- Joan "Fingers" Conlon accompanied Julian Patrick in an evening of songs from Broadway at the Alvord home 2/93.
- Choristers helped celebrate Frank Trujillo's marriage to Cora Scharf 7/93.
- Retreats moved to LOMA Center, Issaquah, 10/93-present.
- 2nd chorus tape "Christmas with the PNWCC" featured many old favorites from 10 years of performances 10/93.
- Jean Leik, chorus charter member, 5 years retired, died 11/93.
- Fundraising extravaganza, Nippon Kan Theatre, featured the advanced amateur talents of individual choristers, plus the memorable male voices committing ditties like "Bear Camp" and "Pleas-a Mister Columbus, turn-a da ship aroun'" 2/94.
- ACDA NW conference, invited performance, Tacoma 3/94.
- Barbara Broderick became chorus librarian 7/94.
- Chorus sang at the William Bergsma Memorial Concert, UW 10/94.
- G&S concert dedicated to Otis Pease-- suitable roast afterward, featuring the Demented Mezzos 2/95.
- Fund-raising "gala" at The Ruins, featuring Michaela Gurevich 2/95.
- Elaine Koga stepped down as accompanist and pianist "extraordinaire" after 13 seasons with the chorus. Her successor: Kevin Johnson, 5/95.

- Spring concert "Zigeuner!", Joan's last as PNWCC conductor and a huge success in Seattle, went to Whidbey Island, attendance: 6. Whoops! Sponsor mixed up the dates. Never mind: After a 3-day recording session at St. Thomas Center, the concert was immortalized on the chorus's 1st published CD "The Romantic Gypsy" to honor Joan 6/95.
- Summer party at Newland home on Vashon to bid farewell to Joan on her departure for U. Colorado 7/95.
- The Pinocchio Caper, or how the PNWCC made big bucks recording *"the sun is like a golden yellow cherry, without the pit"* to the tune of *"Funiculi Funicula"* for a Disney Productions crew in shiny slacks, St. Thomas 3/96.
- Gala fundraiser at the Ruins: Carmen Pelton and Steve Novacek 4/96.
- Kevin Johnson departed for position as pianist-accompanist with the Seattle Symphony Chorale 6/96.
- Choral celebration, Joan Conlon guest conducting, of Jenkins/Herndon marriage 9/96.
- Benefit recital/auction, Alvord home: Julian Patrick, Andrew Childs, Amy Cheifetz, Julie Reynolds, Steve and chorus members, Bernstein songs 2/97.
- Steve Demorest's "Credo" concert recorded for chorus's 2nd CD 3/97.
- Frank Conlon, steadfast bass-baritone for over 20 seasons, spouse of the former director, and faithful guarantor that she would arrive for every rehearsal and performance calm, unflappable, and on time, returned once more to the chorus to narrate, with his incomparable wit and style, the plot of "Candide" in the *"Basically Bernstein"* concert 6/97.

PERSPECTIVES

When the Northwest Chamber Chorus first appeared in 1968, church choirs abounded, but aside from university and college student ensembles and the Seattle Symphony Chorale, only a tiny handful of choral groups graced the Seattle scene. Because, historically, more choral music was sacred than secular, the principal body of choral performance available to the public centered on the Christian traditions of the past 300-years. That same year, however, the Northwest Boychoir and Girlchoir also appeared, as did George Shangrow's Seattle Chamber Singers. Four years later Seattle Pro Musica and the Northwest Chamber Orchestra started, followed shortly by the Philharmonia Orchestra and the Early Music Guild. Today one may add to the list the Seattle Bach Choir, City Cantabile, the Seattle Choral Company, Seattle Men's Chorus, Choral Arts Northwest, the Tudor Choir, the Esoterics, and perhaps a half-dozen others more-or-less well-known; and, just as important, most of the same church choirs and not a few new ones.

The NWCC and some of its sibling groups grew into competent maturity in the early 1980s, and they tended to flourish for some of the same reasons, such as a not too overcrowded market for choral concerts and the increasing variety of secular music, both new and old. Ticket sales soared, as we have seen, and financial and institutional stability gave promise of some security to an historically hazardous enterprise. But the "market" tightened competitively, and public funds began to shrink. Ticket sales leveled even as the musical

fare broadened to include a new generation of remarkable composers. A new secular chorus starting up today might face a far harder struggle than did the NWCC thirty years ago. One of the chamber chorus's present strengths has been its evolution toward a substantial variety of music within the western classical tradition. Its library holds over 100 pieces from the medieval-renaissance era, over 100 for the 17th-18th centuries, about 80 from 1800-1920, and over 100 from the past eighty years. The repertory includes twelve languages, and its total music is more or less evenly divided between secular and sacred.

Patterns of chorus funding remain at the heart of what the organization and its director choose to do, in distinction to what it may want to do. Since 1993 twelve of the fifteen programs it has performed have supported themselves; for the ten years previous only three of 27 did so. On the other hand, chorus overhead in the manager's salary and the director's stipend have together reached nearly 40% of the total budget. Ten years ago chorus reserves could, in a pinch, cover 70% of annual costs; now, somewhat reduced, they cover only one fifth. The margin for error or accident is thinner than any time since the late '70s. Yet to re-arrange the budget mix carries risks unless the change arises from a substantial breakthrough in private and corporate fundraising. History offers some reason to be hopeful. The NWCC is a much stronger organization today than when serious fundraising first began in 1980.

It would be a truism to state that this strength derives from its members. Who are they, and what are the patterns that characterize their history? They have almost always been as diverse as they are now: professors, fishermen, doctors, insurance people, computer specialists, social workers, general teachers, and music teachers — and many more. They all work at something: the NWCC pays none of them except for a rehearsal pianist. They play a major part in their own governance. They elect their board, pass judgment on the director, discuss or argue issues twice a year at meetings or retreats, through extensive surveys of their opinions every couple of years, and every week for nine months each year during rehearsal intermission. Annual turnover of members has steadied at 20% over the past sixteen years except during the interim directorship of 1991-92, when it climbed to 45%. (It is noticeable that turnover did not significantly rise during the important transition of leadership four years later.)

In thirty years, the chorus has seen over 300 singers join, rehearse, perform, and leave. (Another 45 are still singing.) Over one third of that total number sang three years or more, and 35 of the 45 who sang last year had also been with the chorus more than three years. To have been accepted at all, and to have stayed that long, they have had to be counted among the top of the Seattle community's amateur singers. The chorus became one of their training grounds for the achievement of excellence in one of the most ubiquitous art forms in the human experience. For the NWCC to have so affected the lives of so many talented singers is deserving of at least a moment of silence and a modest toast.

As the old song goes, "*Fill every glass...*" [The Beggar's Opera, Air XIX]

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