

Season's Greetings, Happy Holidays, and, oh yeah, Merry Christmas...

Yuletide thoughts from *The Singing Correspondent*

Working on his music over the Thanksgiving break, the Singing Correspondent had occasion to reflect on concerts and holidays past, and recalled that, a mere twelve months ago, the Chorale, which customarily saves its winter offering for a less frenzied January weekend, was preparing for its first Christmas concert in many a season. Why, this time last year we were knee-deep in umlauts and *Eszetts* (ß), trying as best we might to bring Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* to life. It was challenging, it was festive, and, the Correspondent recalls, most of all it was exuberant. *Jauchzet, frohlocket*, proclaimed the first of many rousing chorales. Exult! Shout for joy!

There's a different feel to the material we've been preparing and will present this evening/afternoon. Oh, there's exultation and joy aplenty; note, for instance, the title of the concert's last piece, and exult with guest artist Mykal Kilgore as he takes it to the house. And, of course, we feel sure that Pinkham's *Cantata* and Rutter's *Gloria* will strike the harp and nudge you into appropriately Christmas-y spirits. But, for the Correspondent's money, the heart of this concert sounds a different and deeper note to be found in the piece from which the evening takes its title, *O Magnum Mysterium*.

In his notes on the piece, reprinted in this program, composer Morton Lauridsen speaks of hoping to create a "powerful and transformative" effect on the listener. Certainly something like that happens for the singers as well, and it's an effect that many of the Chorale were in need of at our weekly rehearsal the night of Wednesday, November 9. Without wandering too far into the weedy world of current events, the Correspondent can attest that the mood of the group that evening was subdued, bordering on somber—this is Brownstone Brooklyn, after all, bluer than which, politically speaking, it does not get. Jason,* sensing this, but naming no names, reminded us of the healing power of art and gently invited us to use the music as balm for the soul—but without sentimentality.

Which sort of worked. That, and the fact that we happened to be working that evening, not in the rehearsal room, but in the splendor of Grace Church, where the starry canopy seemed somehow to abide and transcend the shock and awe of the twenty-four hours past. We gathered in the aisle and for the first time sang *O Magnum Mysterium* in mixed sections. And then we worked the other piece that could hardly be more timely for an apparently hopelessly divided electorate and country: *Hope for Resolution*.

It's our hope that the music and this sacred space—stunningly restored to its 19th Century exuberance—create a powerful and transformative effect for you this evening/afternoon. It's a return engagement for the Chorale; we have not sung here, the place where Grace Choral Society first formed 40 years ago, for many a year, and it feels right to be back.

Finally, in reviewing his message from last year's concert, the Singing Correspondent noticed that he, apropos of the alleged war on Christmas, ironically wished concertgoers Merry Christmas, "as President Trump would have us do," and Happy Holidays and Greetings of the Season "while it's still legal." The Correspondent finds himself chagrined, but nevertheless, on behalf of the entire Chorale, wishes you peace and joy in whatever formulation you prefer.

Gracefully,
The Singing Correspondent