

CHORALART – PROGRAMMING

Why do we sing what we sing? How are programs developed? There is a process in accord with our Mission and Vision statements – including consultation with Music Advisory Committee and Board of Directors, as well as occasional surveys of singers – that guides our selection. In order of importance:

#1—Is it interesting?

(Part A) I teach/conduct music that I believe in, and over the years I have developed a pretty good idea of what interests you as well. We like mainstream choral music, and we do a fair amount of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Vaughan Williams and Mozart. We like slightly edgy classical programming, so we sing Poulenc, Stravinsky and Menotti. We tolerate small doses of strangeness, so we will sing (occasionally) Janáček, Kaddish and The Bells. And, we like introducing Maine audiences to new music, so we program Bluegrass Mass, Alzheimer’s Stories, Luminosity, Holocaust Cantata, and Matthew Shepard.

(Part B) Does our audience want to hear it? As much as I might like to program a particular work or as much as you want to sing it, we all feel deflated if few are interested, and attendance is low.

(Part C) Does this opportunity increase the visibility of ChoralArt in the community?

#2—Is it possible?

(Part A)? Can we sing it well? Many wonderful choral works are simply too difficult for us or too difficult to learn in the time available. Many of you have had extensive experience singing a wide variety of choral music with some very fine choirs; you have good suggestions—all of which I consider. That is the first criterion: can we sing this piece of music to a high artistic standard?

(Part B) Sometimes it is not possible to fit all of the music that we would like to sing into the time available for its preparation. We have a relatively short season: essentially 30 weeks of rehearsal preparation. With two “boiler-plate” concerts – Christmas at the Cathedral and a concert with PSO – the bulk of any season is scheduled before any further planning occurs. That leaves, in essence, 10 weeks to prepare and deliver one more concert. Sidebar: sometimes we have little/no choice in scheduling. When the PSO says, Let’s do Verdi “Requiem” the first week of May, we say YES immediately, and then plan around that. That is the second criterion: can we deliver a quality product in the time available?

#3—Is it feasible? Can we afford it? Do we want to take a risk with a major production in Merrill Auditorium? Do we want to commission a new work? How much do we want to spend on that commission? Do we want to take the show on the road and how much will that cost in time and money?

#4—Is it fair? These are some questions about fairness that I have received over the past several years: Why can’t Masterworks sing more concerts? Why can’t Singers do a second substantial program? Why do you choose the same people over and over to sing solos? Why can’t more people have opportunities to sing in small ensembles? My answer goes to the heart of the mission of ChoralArt: As I am selecting a program and choosing soloists/instrumentalists to deliver that program, I am thinking first and foremost about artistry. What can we sing well to an appreciative audience that will be within our budget? We know two of those answers: Christmas at the Cathedral (CA Singers) and PSO (Masterworks). What we program for that third concert is the substance of considerable conversation at meetings of the Music Advisory Committee.

In sum: The choice for a concert season involves a consideration of several variables: recent history, varied composers/styles, opportunities that present themselves (FOKO, PSO or other), unanticipated discoveries (Matthew Shepard), new directions (Bluegrass Mass), balance among ensembles, and/or just plain desire (Mass in B Minor).