



ROSSINI NOTES

VOL. 145 NO. 2

Newsletter of the Portland Rossini Club

Winter, 2016

From our President

Here we are in the middle of winter, three snow storms into the season!

The Rossini Club has already offered four diverse and excellent concerts.

As I write this on the MLK holiday, I am reflecting on the abundance of talent and good will in our club. Yesterday's musical offering of *The Five Canticles* of Benjamin Britten featured five Rossini members and two guests. What a treat to hear this somewhat obscure collection of Britten's performed in its entirety.

Yesterday the Rossini Board met following the concert and reception. Spirited discussion ensued as we mapped out the upcoming events in the Rossini year.

One of these events is the CVB mixer* coming up on February 2 at the Masonic Hall next to City Hall in Portland. Last month our club was chosen to be the highlighted member group. Mark Rossnagel and Jazmin DeRice have agreed to represent the Club with voice and piano.

If you would like to hear more about this event, or would like to attend the mixer, please get in touch with me: Cecile, #207-332-6117 or musikmom@maine.rr.com.

Cecile DeRoche-Cain
President, Portland Rossini Club

*CVB is the Greater Portland Convention and Visitor's Bureau. They hold monthly mixers where we get to know other members and (most important) convey who we are. This can get our name out to the general public, especially to people who contact the public, (for instance, a concierge for a hotel, who might send visitors to our concerts). The coming mixer is a special opportunity for us to show what we do, as well as to talk about it.

CALL TO OUR WINTER BUSINESS MEETING

- **Date: Sunday, February 21**
- **Time: approx. 4:30 PM**
(following our program/
reception)
- **Place: Chapter Room, St. Luke's Cathedral**

Be sure to check out the review of our January 17 concert, written by reviewer Allan Kozinn, which we include on page 4.

Congratulations to members Mark Braun, George Eisenhauer, Joshua Miller, Jazmin DeRice, and Seth Blank for a fine performance!

**Check out our website.
Find us at
www.rossiniclub.org**

**Check out our Facebook Page!
"Like" it!
Ask your friends to "like" it.**

From our Program Chair

Hello friends!

We're halfway through the season, and have heard some great music so far. January's concert, featuring Benjamin Britten's *Five Canticles*, was a special event. Britten's *Canticles* (he used the word to mean "an extended setting of a single poem, not necessarily biblical, on a subject of spiritual significance" - thanks to Mark Braun for the definition) are rarely presented together. They are individual works written over the span of 30 years and not with any unified purpose, although three are memorials. The one constant is the tenor voice: Britten often wrote for his partner, Peter Pears, and these canticles are no exception. George Eisenhauer sang the tenor role admirably on Sunday, with assistance from baritone Josh Miller and mezzo-soprano Jazmin DeRice, and with guests countertenor James Brown and harpist Mo Nichols. Mark Braun, who played the piano for the performance, also composed detailed program notes which gave context to the music, and included the texts by such greats as T.S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell, and Francis Quarles. It was a tremendous experience to hear them together - many thanks to the performers.

Coming up in February we'll hear a few movements of Brahms *Clarinet Sonata in E flat* op. 120 no. 2 performed by Stephen Schiffman and Richard Roberts, two Chopin waltzes and a Brahms *Ballade* performed by Mark Rossnagel, some wonderful "soprano's laments" - tragic arias from Purcell to Puccini, and finally some piano works of Franz Liszt, including selections from *Années de Pèlerinage*, performed by Eric Peppe. The March concert will feature a premiere of a new work by composer Arthur Wellwood: *Two Landscapes for Clarinet, Violoncello and Piano*: I. *Springtime Elegy* II. *Coast of Maine--a Saltarello*, to be performed by Steve Schiffman, Bob Enman, and guest cellist, Bill Myers. In April we will hear Chausson's *Chanson Perpetuelle* for voice and pianoquartet, performed by Jazmin DeRice, Eleanor Lehmann, Leah Neuchiller, Barbara Graustein and Susanna Adams, and Mary Johnston performing a set of soprano arias about Love (which will be a nice contrast to February's Laments!) Finally, the May concert will highlight poetry in English - by such greats as Robert Louis Stevenson, Walt Whitman and William Shakespeare, to name a few.

There is lots to see and hear! Looking forward to seeing you all at St. Luke's.

Lulette Saul

From Sheila McGarr

(Sheila is our friendly Treasurer who greets us at the inside door; hands out programs, carefully proofs our publications, and as you will see, keeps track of our attendance, as well as our finances)

About our Concert Attendance

At each Portland Rossini Club concert since September 2011, tallies of attendees have been taken in several categories: PRC members, seniors (over 62), regular (under 62), guests of performers, and students.

There is an average of 14 PRC members at each concert with higher member attendance when a Membership meeting follows the concert. Seniors are the largest group at each concert except in bad weather. The number of those under 62 average 15 per concert.

Yearly attendance has been rising from 327 in 2011-2012 to 449 in 2014-2015. Attendance from September 2014-January 2015 was 212. In the same period, from September 2015-January 2016, the door count was 283. In both time frames, concerts with multiple vocalists had higher overall adult as well as student attendance. These young performers brought their friends!

Paid advertisements had little effect on concert attendance. However, since the Club's membership in the Greater Portland's Convention and Visitors Bureau as well as expanded web and Facebook presence, there has been an uptick in attendees mentioning these methods of outreach. By far, however, the greatest boost to attendance is "word of mouth."

**Rossini Club
Concert Schedule**

3:00 pm at St. Luke's
Cathedral

February 21

March 20

April 24

May 22

**Rossini Board
and Business Meetings**

Members are expected to attend our business meetings if possible.

Members are invited to attend Board Meetings if they wish. FMI contact

President Cecile DeRoche-Cain
musikmom@maine.rr.com

Winter Business Meeting:
February 21

Spring Board Meeting:
April 24

Annual Meeting:
May 24: Potluck
at Barbara Graustein's home

**OUR OFFICERS and
COMMITTEE CHAIRS
2015 - 2016**

President:
Cecile DeRoche-Cain

First Vice-President:
Luette Saul

Second Vice-President:
Elizabeth Harmon

Recording Secretary:
Susanna Adams

Treasurer:
Sheila McGarr

Assistant Treasurer:
George Eisenhauer

Piano Chair:
Mark Rossnagel

Candidate Chair:
Barbara Graustein

Communications
Committee Chair:
Sheila McGarr

Social Chair:
Jazmin DeRice

Welcome to Our Newest Performing Member

Welcome to our newest performing member, flutist **Edith Leary**. Edith received her Bachelor and Master of Music degrees in flute performance at the New England Conservatory where she studied with the legendary solo flutist of the Boston Symphony, Georges Laurent as well as James Pappoutsakis. While at the NEC, she performed solos at the Gardener Museum and numerous other venues in the Boston area including live broadcasts over WGBH from Jordan Hall. She also received a full scholarship for a summer at Tanglewood where she had the opportunity to play first flute in the Tanglewood orchestra with Leonard Bernstein conducting. She was awarded membership in Pi Kappa Lambda. She moved to the New York area as a free lance musician, performing recitals in Carnegie Recital Hall, Town Hall, and the Brooklyn Museum (many were broadcast live on WNYC). During this time she was also teaching privately. Since moving to Maine, Edith has joined the Marston Kotschmar Club and, last fall, the Rossini Club.

Our Scholarship Competition

Our 2016 Scholarship Competition will take place Saturday afternoon, June 4, at Saint Luke's Cathedral. I am pleased to say that, thanks to the continued generosity of our donors (including many of you), we will again be able to raise the amount we can award - this time to **\$2000 per category**.

We offer scholarships in three different categories:

The Barbara C. Littlefield Vocal Scholarship Fund was created in memory of the Club's longtime treasurer, vocalist, Barbara C. Littlefield.

The Lucia A. Wright Piano Scholarship Fund was established in 2001 as a bequest of pianist, Lucia A. Wright, a member in good standing for fifty-five years.

The Emily K. Rand Instrumental Scholarship Fund was established in 1932 in memory of the Portland Rossini Club's third president, a vocalist, who presided in a distinguished manner for 25 years.

The judges for this competition come from our membership, as well as from Greater Portland's wider musical community. I will be approaching members about helping with this in the spring.

Last year's competition was (I hope) an anomaly in that we had only one competitor in each category. The result of this was that the judges decided that, instead of presenting the entire \$1500 each to the well-qualified pianist and instrumentalist, and the less qualified vocalist, they presented slightly lesser amounts (\$1200) to the first two, and a smaller amount to the vocalist. Since a first place winner is not eligible to re-apply, this will give each of last year's competitors an opportunity to compete again this year.

From our bylaws, which were recently changed to be more inclusive:

Those eligible for scholarships shall be any residents of the State of Maine aged seventeen or older who are planning further musical study at an accredited music school, college, or university.

If you know of anyone in this category, please call this scholarship competition to their attention. They can find information and applications on our website. Let's make this a REAL competition!

Beth Harmon, Scholarship Chair

More New Members

Each of the members (below) has performed as a guest several times, and now has officially joined Rossini Club. Welcome!!

George Eisenhauer, Tenor:

Originally from Pittsburgh, PA, George holds a Bachelor's degree in Music Performance from the University of Southern Maine and is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Music Education, as well as graduate studies in Music Performance. At USM, George studies with Ellen Chickering and has performed many principal roles in the opera workshop program, such as Rinuccio in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, Alfred from Johann Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*, and selections from Handel's *Acis and Galatea* with the Southern Maine Symphony Orchestra. In Maine, George has been a soloist in the White Mountain Bach Festival's performance of Handel's *Messiah*, as well as the Penobscot Bay Singers' performance of Handel's *Messiah* last December. He has also performed the role of Frederic in Lincoln County Community Theater's production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance*. George became a member of Rossini Club in 2015.

Mark Rossnagel, Piano: Mark holds a Bachelor of Music in organ performance from SUNY Binghamton and is finishing his Master's in piano performance at the University of Southern Maine, where he studies with Laura Kargul. In 2014 he joined the faculty at USM to teach two courses of class piano, and began his tenure as music director at First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church in Portland. He is active in the Greater Portland musical community as both soloist and collaborator and enjoys teaching piano to students of all ages and levels. He joined Rossini Club in 2014.

Stephen Schiffman, Clarinet:

Prior to moving to Portland, Stephen Schiffman, emeritus faculty member at Babson College and the F.W. Olin College of Engineering, lived in Boston for 30 years and played with various ensembles and chamber music groups there. He has been playing the clarinet for over 55 years and his teachers have included Sherman Friedland, Julie Vaverka and Thomas Hill. Also a member of the Marston-Kotzschmar Club, he joined Rossini Club in 2015. He serves on the Board of Visitors of the New England Conservatory of Music.

Review in the Portland Press Herald, Wednesday, January 20, 2016 of our January 17th concert

Britten's Canticles get seamless treatment

By **ALLAN KOZINN**

The British composer Benjamin Britten composed his five *Canticles* between 1947 and 1975, and regarded them as separate works, rather than as a cohesive set. They draw on texts that range from a 15th-century liturgical drama to poetry by T.S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell, and they are scored for different combinations of voices and instruments. What they have in common is shapely writing for the tenor voice (Britten composed all five to be sung by his lifelong partner, Peter Pears). Britten's lyrical and often ritualistically dramatic style, which changed only subtly in the nearly three decades between the first and the last, links the five as well.

In any case, these pieces sit together well, as the Portland Rossini Club demonstrated in satisfying traversal of the Canticles at St. Luke's Cathedral on Sunday afternoon. The club, which was founded in 1869, originally as a women's group (male performers were admitted in the 1980s), is open to talented amateurs as well as full-time musicians, and operates happily on the fringes of Portland's professional music world. But some of its presentations, including this one, are adventurous and ready for prime time.

Judging from the program biographies, most of the performers are professional players or music students. Two exceptions

– Mark Braun, the capable pianist in four of the five works (and the author of the program notes) and Seth Blank, the hornist in *Canticle III* – are both physicians. A third, Mo Nichols, the harpist on *Canticle V*, is a speech-language pathologist, but also the principal harpist of the Bangor Symphony Orchestra.

The tenor in all five works, George Eisenhauer, a graduate student at the University of Southern Maine, brought a graceful, focused sound and a subtle dramatic sensibility to Britten's music. Among the solo pieces, he was particularly effective in *Canticle III, Still Falls the Rain (The Raids, 1940. Night and Dawn)*, in which the verses of Sitwell's mystical text are interspersed between brisk variations for piano and horn. In the closing verse, where Britten has the voice and horn join forces in a concise evocation of God's continuing faith in mankind, despite our evil and self-destructive tendencies, Eisenhauer and Blank meshed beautifully.

Eisenhauer also offered a powerful rendering of *Canticle V, The Death of Saint Narcissus*, with Nichols' fluid harp accompaniment, and a sensitive account of *Canticle I, My Beloved is Mine and I am His*.

But the most striking performances were those in which Eisenhauer was part of a vocal ensemble. In *Canticle IV, Journey of the Magi*, he was joined by James Brown, a countertenor with a pleasingly warm, powerful tone, and Joshua Miller, a solid baritone. Both in the work's quasi-choral sections and in passages where the vocal lines were in counterpoint, the three singers produced an attractive, balanced sound. And in *Canticle II, Abraham and Isaac*, Eisenhauer and mezzo-soprano Jazmin DeRice blended exquisitely in the opening passage, in which Britten combined their timbres to suggest the voice of God. Thereafter, Eisenhauer sang Abraham's lines, and DeRice sang Isaac's, both to excellent effect.

Allan Kozinn is a former music critic and culture writer for The New York Times who lives in Portland. He can be contacted at: allankozinn@gmail.com

Twitter: kozinn
CONCERT REVIEW
WHO: Portland Rossini Club

WHAT: "Five Canticles of Benjamin Britten"

WHERE: The Cathedral Church of St. Luke, Portland

DATE REVIEWED: Jan. 17

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