

Chorus pro Musica at 70

By Peter Pulsifer, October 2019

Based in part on the 50th anniversary essay by David Frieze

In the Beginning

These days it's tough to imagine the Boston choral scene in the mid-1940's. There was nothing like today's rich proliferation of choruses, each trying to carve out its niche. Apart from church choirs, there were, essentially, the Handel & Haydn Society and the Cecilia Society. In their nineteenth-century heyday, when the oratorio was a mass cultural phenomenon inspiring large crowds of both spectators and performers, each organization had been an important musical force in the city, premiering new works and dusting off seldom heard classics. But no one was writing oratorios much anymore. For most of the first half of the twentieth century, H&H and Cecilia were content to serve up strictly traditional fare.

In 1948, Alfred Nash ("Bud") Patterson was organist and choir director of Christ Church in Cambridge. The church wanted an evening choir, but he had difficulty getting people to regularly sing in the evening services. So he founded a "semi concert" choir of 40–50 voices: the whole group would sing about three concert services a year, and Bud could count on having about 20 of them to sing the regular services.

This group of singers was called the Polyphonic Choir, and it quickly became evident that the choir was really a vehicle for Bud Patterson to share his choral enthusiasms with the world. It was to be, he wrote, "a choral group emulating, fashioned in the likeness of, and daily increasing with spirit of the Collegiate Chorale in New York." The Collegiate Chorale was the professional chorus created by Robert Shaw, who had been one of Bud's teachers at Tanglewood. Before Shaw, the standards of choral singing in the United States had been almost entirely those of amateurs. Shaw began to change all that, and Bud Patterson followed close behind. "Until recently," Bud wrote in 1948, "choral music has suffered many artistically impure practices, and the goal of perfection is a lot harder to attain than it is for an instrumental group in regard to pitch, rhythm, ensemble, tone, etc. But the ideal in choral singing is a finer and more musical mode of expression than any other field of music. But there is no reason to get excited about just another chorus."

The Polyphonic Choir got off to a good start, giving the first Boston performances of Aaron Copland's *In the Beginning* and Benjamin Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*, and the American premiere of Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Benedicite*. "Our policy," Bud said, "was to do unusual things in order to attract those musicians who were challenged by and capable of taking on new things and were tired of the old things."

What really put Bud Patterson and his singers on the map was the Mozart Mass in C minor, presented on March 21, 1949 at Trinity Church in Copley Square. Hard as it is to believe today, that was the first time the Mozart work had been done in New England. The seating capacity of Trinity Church was 1,400 people, but some 2,200 showed up for the performance—crowded into pews, standing in every corner, and sitting in the aisles. Needless to say, the concert was an immense success—as was the soprano soloist, a then little-known local singer named Phyllis Curtin.

Bud soon left Christ Church to become choirmaster at the Church of the Advent in Boston, taking some of his singers with him. Christ Church wanted to keep the name "Polyphonic Choir," so the group needed a new name. In September 1949, after considering suggestions including the Panchoral, the Acrophonic Choir, the Surette Choir, the Causa Musica Chorus and the Canto Bene, they finally settled upon Chorus pro Musica (the "chorus for music").

Chorus pro Musica Achieves Fame

Chorus pro Musica was off and running. In 1950 it sang the American premiere of Marcel Dupré's *De Profundis* and the Boston premiere of Igor Stravinsky's *Mass*. Then, in August 1950, Bud wrote from Tanglewood that Boston Symphony Orchestra Music Director Serge Koussevitzky wanted to work with the chorus. In December, Koussevitzky, by then retired, returned as a BSO guest conductor to lead the American premiere of French composer Henri Barraud's *La Mystère des Saints Innocents*. Afterwards, Koussevitzky said that CpM was "the best chorus I've ever heard." Cecil Smith, writing for *Musical America*, echoed his words: "The chorus was one of the best, both musically and tonally, I have ever heard in a symphonic performance."

CpM did not sing again with the BSO until 1957, when Charles Munch led performances of Barraud's *Te Deum* and Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. But from then until the creation of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus in 1970, CpM was the BSO's chorus of choice. Only a few months after the Barraud-Beethoven concert, Munch invited the chorus back to perform another new work, Stravinsky's *Canticum Sacrum*. CpM sang Beethoven's Ninth in 1960 under the baton of Pierre Monteux in celebration of his 85th birthday (a concert that did as much as anything to secure CpM a preeminent position in Boston's choral scene); then in 1962 with Munch for his last concert as music director; then under Erich Leinsdorf's direction in 1969 for his last concert as music director; then again in 1970 under William Steinberg's direction.

In 1959, CpM performed for the first and only time under the direction of Bud's old friend, Robert Shaw. Shaw, who led the chorus and the BSO in Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, was the chorus director for the Cleveland Orchestra at the time. At one point during the rehearsal, he turned to Bud and said, "You know, Patterson, I wish I had this tenor section out in Cleveland." To which Bud replied, "You know, Shaw, sometimes I wish you did, too." This program was also the first that CpM performed in New York, when the BSO took it to Carnegie Hall shortly afterwards.

CpM sang only one concert with Munch and the BSO in 1961, but it was an important one: the world premiere of Francis Poulenc's *Gloria*. Bud sat up in the first balcony with the composer leaning over the stage during rehearsals. In Bud's words, "Munch and Poulenc kept up a running fire of guttural French, comments about how things should go, that sort of thing. Our accompanist — this was a piano rehearsal — played through the thing, and after he'd gone through it perhaps twice, Poulenc came down onto the stage and sat at the piano. He had hands as big as baseball gloves and sounded like half a symphony orchestra, playing three times as many notes as there were in the score, and in a sense he conducted from the piano, just to show us how he wanted it to go. The conducting strength he had from the piano was amazing. We had a good time with him. Very genial fellow."

Poulenc and the chorus got along well together—CpM had already performed a number of his works, including the Boston premiere of his fiendishly difficult *La Figure humaine* for a cappella chorus. At the time of his death in 1963, Poulenc was working on a piece for the chorus, which, alas, he never finished.

One of Erich Leinsdorf's first concerts as music director in 1962 included the Stravinsky *Symphony of Psalms*. This was taken to New York, where CpM became the first Boston chorus to sing at the new Philharmonic (now Avery Fisher) Hall. Leinsdorf and CpM became very good friends during his tenure, and CpM appears on four recordings made for RCA in the 1960's and 1970's under his direction.

In 1963, CpM joined with the BSO under Leinsdorf's baton, along with the Columbus Boys' Choir and soloists Phyllis Curtin, Nicholas DiVirgilio, and Tom Krause, to perform the American premiere of the *War Requiem* of Benjamin Britten. About 15,000 people showed up on a scorching hot day at Tanglewood to hear it. The performance, recorded by WGBH TV, is now available on DVD.

In 1964, CpM sang two requiems with the Boston Symphony, both recorded for RCA, and both garnering Grammy nominations. The first, by Mozart, was a memorial concert for John F. Kennedy at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross. The second, by Verdi, was performed at Tanglewood that summer and later recorded with Birgit Nilsson, Lili Chookasian, Carlo Bergonzi and Ezio Flagello.

The following year was the year of Wagner's *Lohengrin*, which was presented at Tanglewood over a period of three days—an act a day—after which everyone was flown back to Boston to record it. *Lohengrin* was the first Wagner opera ever recorded in this country, and one of the few operas ever recorded by a major American orchestra. It also ended up being one of the most expensive recordings of its day.

The recording session coincided with a major heat wave, and engineers installed fourteen air conditioners in the Symphony Hall concert hall, blowing the hot air out into the corridors. In the hall itself it was very comfortable, but out in the corridors it reached about 120 degrees. The recording setup had the orchestra spread out where the seats usually are and the chorus up on stage. Thus, the chorus was about 75 feet away from Leinsdorf and 30 feet behind the orchestra, and Leinsdorf constantly had to stop and do a section over again because of the time lag.

In the late 1960's, the Boston Symphony, having decided it would be wise to found its own chorus, offered the job to Chorus pro Musica. Bud and his Board of Trustees declined the offer, wishing to retain their autonomy, and CpM's final regular concert with the BSO was the Beethoven Ninth with Bernard Haitink in 1973 (although in 1975 it participated in a series of Youth Concerts under the direction of Harry Ellis Dickson).

In tandem with all those BSO concerts, of course, CpM was giving dozens of its own concerts, as well as being the city's busiest chorus for hire. Versatility was always the name of the game, and the chorus, particularly in its early years, seldom turned down a reasonable opportunity. CpM even tried its hand at television, appearing in an episode of the 1980's series *Spenser: For Hire* as a red-robed choir singing "Gimme That Old-Time Religion" behind the actor John Davidson, who played a shady evangelist.

Performances of the Bud Patterson Era

A glance at the list of works that CpM performed during its beginning decades will show you a huge and impressive roster of contemporary works. Bud Patterson had participated in the first American performance of Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* at Tanglewood, and over the years CpM performed not only that work but almost all of Britten's major, and many of his minor, choral compositions. Poulenc and Stravinsky loomed large in the Chorus's repertoire, as did the music of Charles Ives, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Hugo Distler, and Leonard Bernstein (who shared Bud Patterson's hometown of Lawrence, Mass.).

Premieres of one sort or another have always been a CpM specialty. CpM gave the first performance of Walter Piston's only major choral work, *Psalm and Prayer of David*, and, in 1952, gave the American premiere of Maurice Duruflé's Requiem. A long and happy association with Daniel Pinkham resulted in several premieres, including his *St. Mark Passion*, commissioned by St. Mark's School in Southborough. The winner of a new works competition sponsored by the chorus in the early 1960's was an *Ave Maria* by a young Harvard student named John Harbison. Two CpM members had works premiered on one program in 1951—Klaus George Roy's *Canticle of the Sun* and Ray Wilding-White's *Why Do the Heathen Rage?* Many of Wilding-White's choral works, including his beautiful Mass and his somber *The Ship of Death*, were premiered by CpM.

A large part of CpM's reputation has also been based on reviving worthy music of the past. Boston's present status as the Capital of Early Music makes it difficult to realize that until CpM came along, choral music of the lesser-known Renaissance and Baroque composers was left largely untouched here except, occasionally, by church choirs. CpM introduced local

audiences to works by Monteverdi, Vivaldi (including the Boston premiere of his *Gloria*), Schütz, Gabrieli, Buxtehude and Praetorius, to name just a few.

The final program of CpM's 1978–1979 season—its thirtieth—was half choral concert (works by Dvorak, Mussorgsky, Schumann, and others) and half vocal recital (songs by Brahms and Prokofiev, sung by mezzo-soprano Jan Curtis). The choral part was led by Bud Patterson. The accompanist for the solo section was Donald Palumbo. Don had been associated with the chorus for years, starting out as a member of the tenor section in the late 1960's and eventually becoming chorus manager. For a few years in the 1970's he lived and studied in Vienna; upon his return to Boston he began an active career as a vocal coach, accompanist, and preparer of opera choruses. This concert was his first appearance with CpM after his return.

What nobody knew then was that it would also be Bud Patterson's last concert. Even after a heart attack in the mid-1960's, Bud continued to pursue a course of musical activities that would have exhausted a man half his age. In the summer of 1979 he underwent coronary bypass surgery. Midway through rehearsals for the 1979–1980 season's first concert, Bud Patterson died at the age of 65. Don Palumbo conducted the performance, which was dedicated to the Bud's memory, and shortly thereafter was named Music Director of Chorus pro Musica, a post he held for the next ten years.

Don Palumbo Takes the Reins

In many respects, and apart from their personal conducting styles, Don Palumbo was the ideal choice to succeed Bud Patterson. A first-rate musician, he also knew the chorus inside out. He had even lived with the Pattersons for a while on his return from Vienna. And there is little question that if he hadn't agreed to take the reins, CpM might have died with its founder.

It was a critical time for the chorus, for reasons that had little to do with Bud's death. First of all, while CpM had never been the Boston Symphony's official chorus—and had in fact declined when offered the chance—the severing of ties with the orchestra deprived the chorus of a good chunk of its own identity. In addition, the chorus was a victim of its own success. At the start, from the 1940's through well into the 1960's, it had no real competition for what it was doing. But it had created an appreciation for first-rate choral performance in Boston, and other organizations had sprung up to take advantage of the situation. One organization which rapidly became and remains a valued member of the Boston choral scene, the Cantata Singers, was in fact founded by some former members of CpM.

CpM gave many extraordinary concerts under Don Palumbo's direction. Throughout the 1980's, in a city where small, tight, transparent choral sound had become almost a fetish, Chorus pro Musica continued to be unashamed to produce a big, rich, healthy sound where it was needed. Don also continued the CpM tradition of exploring the lesser-known reaches of the repertoire, focusing especially on music of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Brahms motets and part songs, Bruckner masses, cantatas by Elgar and Vaughan Williams. Towards the end of his tenure, Don led the chorus in a performance of Vaughan Williams's *Sea Symphony* that is generally considered to be one of the crowning achievements of CpM's first 40 years. Don also programmed and conducted regular a cappella concerts, each devoted to the music of a single country—England, the United States, France, Germany, Italy.

Collaborations with Craig Smith and Benjamin Zander—and others

During Don Palumbo's tenure, CpM entered into fruitful collaborations with two important musicians: Craig Smith, who founded Emmanuel Music in the 1970's, and Benjamin Zander, founder and director of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra. Craig Smith first worked with the chorus as a guest conductor in a concert that included Stravinsky's *Les Noces*. This developed into a series of annual concerts with Emmanuel Music: first, a rare performance of

Mozart's opera *Idomeneo*, and subsequently, two even rarer Handel oratorios, *Theodora* and *Alexander Balus*.

Chorus pro Musica first sang with Benjamin Zander and the Boston Philharmonic in March 1981 in a performance of the Verdi Requiem that had Boston's musical community talking for weeks afterwards. Zander immediately sensed that this chorus had the sound and the flexibility he was looking for, and his trust in Don Palumbo's judgment as a choral director was absolute. Zander's performances of Beethoven's Ninth at Symphony Hall and Carnegie Hall generated a certain amount of controversy about metronome markings, fueled by Zander's own essay on the subject, which he distributed with the programs and which inspired a lengthy article/rebuttal by the *New Yorker's* Andrew Porter. Another high point was Mahler's "Resurrection" Symphony in 1982, again performed at Symphony Hall and repeated some months later at Carnegie Hall, where the concert was delayed about twenty minutes so that tickets could be sold to a line of people that stretched around the block.

CpM sang often with Zander throughout Don Palumbo's tenure—some 13 concert programs by 1990, including repeat performances of those great Beethoven and Mahler works as well as Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, the Brahms Requiem, and others. The collaboration still continues, with over 26 collaborative programs to the present day, the most recent being Edward Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* in 2018.

Another musical collaboration was with the Pittsburgh Symphony during its few years of summer residence at Great Woods. Michael Tilson Thomas invited CpM to perform Borodin's *Polovtsian Dances* on a program that included Leontyne Price singing arias by Mozart and Verdi. Shortly thereafter came Mahler's *Das klagende Lied* on the evening after a rainy afternoon; frogs came out in hordes, and their croaking featured prominently, if unintentionally, in the performance.

CpM as an Opera Chorus

Don Palumbo's passion for opera and his outstanding talent for preparing opera choruses led CpM into an exciting new artistic field. An invitation from Sarah Caldwell and the Opera Company of Boston led to CpM's introduction to stage makeup and costumes in her production of *Aida* with Shirley Verrett, David Arnold and the late James McCracken. The Chorus also appeared with the Opera Company in the Boston premiere of Leonard Bernstein's *Mass*.

Palumbo also introduced CpM to concert opera, with Boston Concert Opera performances of Beethoven's *Fidelio* and, most memorably, a 1985 Boston Opera Association performance of Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* with Dame Joan Sutherland and Jerry Hadley, conducted by Richard Bonyngé. During rehearsals, Dame Joan would sit knitting until it was her turn to sing; she would then stand, face the house, and produce a sound so glorious and rich and—well, enormous—that it startled the chorus every time they heard it; and then she would sit and continue her knitting.

An Eventful Year with Donald Kendrick

Donald Palumbo left CpM in 1988 to become Chorus Master of the Chicago Lyric Opera (in 2007 he moved to the Metropolitan Opera in New York, where he remains today). He was replaced by Donald Kendrick, a Canadian-born conductor who was on leave from his position as Director of Choral Activities at California State University, Sacramento. Kendrick's opening concert at Jordan Hall was a program dedicated to veterans of all wars that included Fauré's Requiem and Vaughan Williams's *Dona Nobis Pacem*; Kendrick's former conducting teacher, Lorna Cooke de Varon, was in the audience cheering him on. His season also included an ambitious "American-Russian Choral Festival" with works by Titov, Tchernin and Shostakovich along with Bernstein, Fissinger, and Hairston—among many others—and a concert of music by Canadian composers, who are still sadly neglected around here.

Don Kendrick returned to Sacramento after his year's sabbatical was up—where he went on to found the 200-voice Sacramento Choral Society and Orchestra and the Sacramento Children's Chorus. That summer James Oleson prepared the chorus for a unique collaboration at Great Woods with the Pittsburgh Symphony under Leonard Slatkin: William Schuman's "baseball cantata" *Casey at the Bat*. Choristers attired in shorts and tee shirts, with borrowed children perched on their shoulders, passed bags of potato chips around the "bleachers" and did a wonderful "wave."

Jeffrey Rink: A Formidable Choral-Orchestral Leader

Jeffrey Rink became CpM's fourth Music Director in 1990. Having been assistant conductor of the Handel & Haydn Society under Christopher Hogwood from 1986–1990, he was well qualified to lead his debut concert, the Boston premiere of Handel's oratorio *Esther*. His final concert of that season, pairing Zoltán Kodály's *Psalmus Hungaricus* with William Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, was the first time in over 25 years that CpM had performed in Symphony Hall under its own auspices.

Jeff also conducted the New England Philharmonic (until 1996), and collaborations between the two groups yielded several rewarding concerts, including Michael Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* and Paul Hindemith's *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*. The collaboration has continued to this day under Richard Pittman, Jeff's successor at NEP.

Jeff became Music Director of the Newton Symphony Orchestra in 1995, opening new opportunities for collaboration. Those included an annual concert opera performance at the Rashi School in Newton with classics such as *Tosca*, *La Boheme*, *Rigoletto*, and *Don Pasquale*. CpM also joined the Newton Symphony in well-attended performances of Xian Xin-hai's Mandarin-language *Yellow River Cantata* at Jordan Hall in 2000, Lincoln Center in 2001, Carnegie Hall in 2002, and Symphony Hall in 2006.

CpM and Concert Opera Boston

Concert opera became a popular CpM specialty during Jeffrey Rink's tenure. It began with a splendid, sexy *Carmen* in 1992 in Worcester's Mechanics Hall and in Symphony Hall. Following the success of Verdi's *Macbeth* the following year, a group of enthusiasts set up a nonprofit organization, Concert Opera Boston, to support future CpM concert operas under Jeff's direction. With their backing, every CpM season (except the 50th anniversary celebration year) featured a major concert opera, usually performed at Jordan Hall. There were 15 opera programs between 1992 and 2009, including the New England premiere of Verdi's opera *Attila* and a critically acclaimed performance of Arrigo Boito's rarely heard *Mefistofele*. In Jeff's final year, Victoria Livengood headlined a steamy *Carmen* whose atmospherics were enhanced by malfunctioning Jordan Hall air conditioning on a hot June day; and in 2009 Jeff returned to lead an exuberant *Turandot* featuring soprano Othalie Graham and tenor Kip Wilborn.

Jeff led many memorable nonoperatic concerts during his tenure. Those included Kurt Weill's *Das Berliner Requiem* in 1994, sung so fiercely that one Boston Globe critic wrote that he was "relieved to return to the squalors of Boston street life;" the Boston premiere of Antonio Estevez's *La Cantata Criolla* in 1996, which drew a huge Latino audience; and the world premieres of Leon Biriotti's *Sinfonia da Requiem* (with the Newton Symphony) in 1999 and Rouben Gregorian's *Amenian Divine Liturgy* (conducted by Leon Gregorian) in 2001. Jeff also became known for his interpretations of Eastern European composers such as Henryk Gorecki and Krzysztof Penderecki, and he led CpM in performances of Rachmaninoff's *All-Night Vigil* in both 1993 and 2000.

Celebrating the Past, Entering the New Century

For the 1998–1999 season, Jeff presided over the celebration of CpM's 50th anniversary, for which the chorus revisited some of its most celebrated premieres, including Pinkham's *St.*

Mark Passion and Poulenc's *Gloria*. In 2004 he led a gala celebration of Bud Patterson's legacy that included the premiere of Daniel Pinkham's *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day*, commissioned by Choral Arts New England for the occasion, as well as Copland's *In the Beginning* and Charles Ives's knotty *Psalm 90*, which splits the chorus at one point into 22 distinct voices.

Early in the 21st century, Jeff returned to his early music roots and led a magical performance at Boston's Mission Church of Hector Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ* with period instruments; despite heavy snowfall, the concert went on and will be long remembered by those who were there. The concert date fell on Berlioz's 200th birthday. He followed up the next season with a period-instrument performance at Symphony Hall of Berlioz's *Romeo et Juliette* and *Sara La Baigneuse*. In 2007, he led the chorus in a performance of J.S. Bach's *St. John Passsion* with period-instrument orchestra that many members still call a highlight of their tenure in CpM.

The following year, in what was to be his final season, Jeff introduced Boston to Roger Ames's *Requiem for Our Time*, which is based on the highly autobiographical writings of Boston-area poet Anne Sexton. Jeff had originally commissioned the work before coming to Boston; the performance was attended by the composer and by former friends and associates of Anne Sexton.

In 2008, after 18 years with CpM, Jeffrey Rink left for sunnier climes, to be Music Director of the Northwest Florida Symphony Orchestra and a faculty member at Okaloosa-Walton College in Niceville, Florida. (He did return for one last concert opera, *Turandot*, in June 2009.) The chorus embarked on a year-long search that culminated in the selection of Betsy Burleigh as Music Director.

The Betsy Burleigh Era: Commissions, Collaborations, Connections

Betsy Burleigh, a former student of New England Conservatory Professor Lorna Cooke de Varon (like Don Kendrick), was a good match for CpM's interests and strengths: she was Music Director of the Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh, the principal chorus of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (a position that she kept) and Professor and Director of Choral and Vocal Studies at Cleveland State University. She had also been Chorus Master of the Cleveland Opera. However, with Jeff Rink's departure, CpM had decided to end the tradition of concert operas. While the operas had been successful and rewarding, their production was a major administrative and financial burden, even with the substantial support of Concert Opera Boston.

Betsy's first concert as Music Director celebrated the magnificent Skinner organ at Old South Church; and, in CpM tradition, it included a Boston premiere: Zoltán Kodály's *Laudes organi*. The program also included the Duruflé Requiem and Brahms's *Geistliches Lied*. The following March, she led a performance of Ernest Bloch's *Sacred Service*—a collaboration with the Zamir Chorale of Boston, Joshua Jacobson, Music Director—that also included the premiere of the first work directly commissioned by CpM: Andrew Rindfleisch's *Kaddish Prayer*. The season concluded at Jordan Hall with two dramatic choral works filling what had been the concert opera "slot" in the schedule: Carl Orff's *Carina Burana* and Dominick Argento's *I Hate and I Love*, performed with two pianos and percussion.

Betsy continued her new CpM commissioning program with a major work from Abbie Betinis, *Expectans expectavi*, that was premiered in 2011 in a concert that also included Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* (the concert was promoted as "Abbie and Igor"). Another significant commission was Peter Child's *Meditations Upon the Lamb* in 2013, premiered as a companion piece for Mozart's Mass in C minor (the work that had launched CpM's career in 1949).

In 2011, Betsy was named Artistic Director of the Providence Singers, and lost no time in arranging a grand collaboration between her two New England choruses and the New England Philharmonic—to perform Britten's *War Requiem*, under Richard Pittman's direction, in the Catholic cathedrals of Providence and Boston. Each venue (capacity 1,000 and 1,700, respectively) had capacity audiences, and the performances received enthusiastic

reviews. The 2011 season concluded with an innovative presentation of Haydn's *The Creation* that included graphic projections on the stage backdrop of Jordan Hall.

Thoroughly planned programs were a hallmark of Betsy's style. A great example is her 2012 holiday concert, "A Dickens Christmas," which was a reading of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* interspersed with English carols and holiday songs. That season's spring concert, called "Four Weddings and a Funeral," consisted of a wedding cantata by J.S. Bach and love songs by Brahms, Pinkham, and Whitacre, coupled with Bach's funeral motet, "Jesu, meine Freude."

At the beginning of her fourth (2012–2013) season, Betsy announced that she would be leaving at the end of the year to take a faculty position at Indiana University. Her successor was Jamie Kirsch, a dynamic young conductor who was Director of Choral Activities at Tufts University and Music Director of the Cambridge Community Chorus. Jamie had earned a doctorate from Indiana University and a masters from Yale, both in choral conducting, and impressed all with his commitment and with his thoughtful and creative ideas about programming and audience development.

Jamie Kirsch's Baptism of Fire

Jamie Kirsch's introduction to CpM coincided with three September 2013 performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with Benjamin Zander and the Boston Philharmonic—the first such collaboration since 2004. The performances had originally been scheduled for the previous spring (with Betsy Burleigh preparing the chorus), but had been delayed at the last minute by the Boston Marathon bombings in April 2013. Thus, preparations for Jamie's inaugural concert had to be shared with Beethoven concert activities, and the new CpM Music Director needed to quickly get to know his chorus as well as build rapport with the illustrious Maestro Zander, who often appeared at rehearsals with a documentary camera crew in tow. In the end, concert reviews were good—the chorus was praised for "navigating Beethoven's sometimes highly treacherous vocal writing with vigor and ease."

Jamie's first season was both innovative and ambitious. It included what was almost the Boston premiere of James Whitbourne's *Annelies*, an oratorio based on the diary of Anne Frank (the New England Conservatory Concert Choir performed the work just months before CpM), and concluded with J.S. Bach's monumental Mass in B minor, a work that CpM had not performed since the Bud Patterson days.

Modernity and Tradition

Under Jamie's leadership, every season has included a major classical work: after that inaugural B Minor Mass, there was Stravinsky's *Les Noces* in 2015 (accompanied by the BoSoma Dance Company); then, in 2016, Verdi's Requiem (with the Boston Philharmonic) in the spring and Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* the next fall; in 2017, Michael Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* (with the New England Philharmonic) and Mahler's Symphony No. 2 (with the Boston Philharmonic); and in 2018, Edward Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* (with the Boston Philharmonic).

Jamie enthusiastically expanded the CpM commissioning program that had been introduced by Betsy Burleigh, commissioning, among others, two substantial works from Andy Vores: *Spencer the Rover* and *In Childhood's Thicket*; and two from James Kallembach: *The Tryal and Examination of Old Father Christmas*, based on the Old Bay Psalm Book held by Old South Church, and *Audubon*, an oratorio about the American naturalist John James Audubon. Each of those commissions served as the foundation for a CpM concert program.

Jamie also introduced CpM audiences to other modern composers, including Carol Barnett, Eric Whitacre, Dominick Diorio, John Tavener, Arvo Pärt, Jonathan Dove, and John McDonald; and his programs often include works from outside the western tradition and choral settings of popular songs. He may have started a new tradition of "concert musical

theater” with a performance of Gershwin’s *Of Thee I Sing* in 2017 that drew enthusiastic reviews from both critics and chorus members. The second entry in that nascent tradition will be Leonard Bernstein’s *Candide*, planned for June 2020.

Chorus pro Musica has had a distinguished and exciting 70 years. The excitement lives on, both in the many young members who have joined in recent years and in the many veterans from all previous generations who still sing in the chorus (including several who sang under Bud), keeping alive the passion for discovery and choral excellence that inspired the first recruits of the original Polyphonic Choir. Well over 1,000 members have sung with CpM in its history. Many of them were instrumental in driving the dramatic growth in the Boston choral world that began with Bud Patterson; all were able to draw on their CpM experience to enrich their own communities. Today, under its sixth Music Director, Jamie Kirsch, CpM continues the tradition of introducing great new choral music and of bringing together choral masterpieces from all eras and traditions—Medieval, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Twentieth and Twenty-first Century—drawing novel and meaningful connections that celebrate the expressive power of the human voice.