

A NEWSLETTER BY AND FOR THE LA JOLLA SYMPHONY AND CHORUS ASSOCIATION

June 3rd, 2019

Conductor's Note



Michael Gerdes, guest conductor
Photo by Patty Schuchman

As summer begins here in Southern California, the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus brings a close to our season with a program steeped in the past. It's a fitting end to a season entitled "Lineage – A Memory Project." The Treaty of Versailles was signed in June of 1919, exactly five years after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. The entire planet was piecing itself back together after a conflict unlike any that had come before, and with no idea that another still laid ahead. One hundred years later, this program revisits the composers and soldiers of The Great War. This concert is a time for reflection, and we present the music together with words and poetry that were both inspired by and inspired the works that you will hear. We ask that you hold your applause to the end of each half of the concert.

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Conductor's Note continued

Ravel's *La Valse* opens the program. It is an orchestral showpiece that demands virtuosity from every corner of the orchestra. Whether the composer intended it or not, the piece serves as a dazzling commentary on the state of Europe after the war. Ravel marks the beginning of the score "Mouvement de Valse viennoise" and, just like that, a listener emerges from a haze into a bright hall filled with whirling dancers. The energy of the dance becomes feverish, with outbursts from the brass and strange modulations that Johann Strauss would never dream of. The music rushes inexorably forward to its final bar, the only one not in three quarter time. Alex Ross put it this way, "This is a society spinning out of control, reeling from the horrors of the recent past toward those of the near future."

From Hanover Square North, is some of the most beautiful and poignant music that Charles Ives never heard in his own lifetime. It's a giant stew of tunes played in different keys and at different speeds. This is difficult music to understand on the page, but it makes perfect sense in the ear and the heart. The success of performance rests on the conviction that each musician brings to the song they've been given to sing. At its unmistakable climax, the voices sound together, performing an old hymn. In this performance, the chorus will join us in this moment of unity, before the music fades into silence and only the memory remains.

The first half of the program closes with Barber's *Adagio*, a piece written when Barber was only 26 years old in 1936. I think it's the upward leap of the strings, a pleading, and the shattering climax, a cry to the heavens, that have given this simple music

such a profound power over listeners. The piece is an arch, ending much like it begins, but with an emphatic final statement from the violins.

Ralph Vaughan Williams was a friend and student of Ravel before the war. The two of them shared correspondence and served in the military during the conflict. His *Dona Nobis Pacem* was written in the same year as Barber's *Adagio* and is as much a warning as it is a meditation. While Vaughan Williams was surely influenced by his wartime experience, the materials of his cantata are reflections on both recent and ancient horrors. The Latin Mass provides only the title phrase, literally "give us peace," and a brief setting of the "Gloria." Between the pleas for peace, we hear Whitman, the anti-war speeches of John Bright, and the lamentations of Jeremiah. This music is solemn, violent, mournful, and ultimately hopeful. The program closes with the music of Vaughan Williams' dear friend George Butterworth. *The Banks of Green Willow* is a beautiful idyll for the symphony orchestra, filled with glorious solo playing from the winds and lush melodies in the strings. It is neither bold nor bombastic and may seem an odd choice to close the performance, but its power is undeniable. In a concert of works from the past, our final piece is one of the few works that survive by a composer who was robbed of a bright future.

Sir William Golding once wrote, "My yesterdays walk with me. They keep step, they are gray faces that peer over my shoulder." As we look back into the eyes of these gray faces, we find meaning for our lives today, and we still plead for peace. *Dona Nobis Pacem*.

Michael Gerdes



News from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

The close of the 2018-19 season fast approaches, making this my final *Tutti* as your Executive Director. Since the announcement of my retirement, I have heard from many of you, offering kind comments, wishing me well, and sharing memories. Some of us go back well beyond my 13 seasons as your ED, having served with me on the LJS&C Board 15...20...even 25 years ago!

As we look back on our shared accomplishments, we can look forward to exciting transitions and the growth that brings. The ED Search Committee has an outstanding field of candidates from which to choose. They expect to announce my successor within weeks. The announcement of Ruben Valenzuela as our new choral director has recharged our musicians and patrons alike. What interesting intersections might result from the collaboration of Steve and Ruben in the future? I can't wait to find out!

As always, I remain deeply appreciative of the talent, heart and soul you put into every concert. I will always be a fan of La Jolla Symphony and Chorus. *Thank you!*

Diane Salisbury



**Early bird
subscription
deadline **June 28**
(prices go up in July!)**

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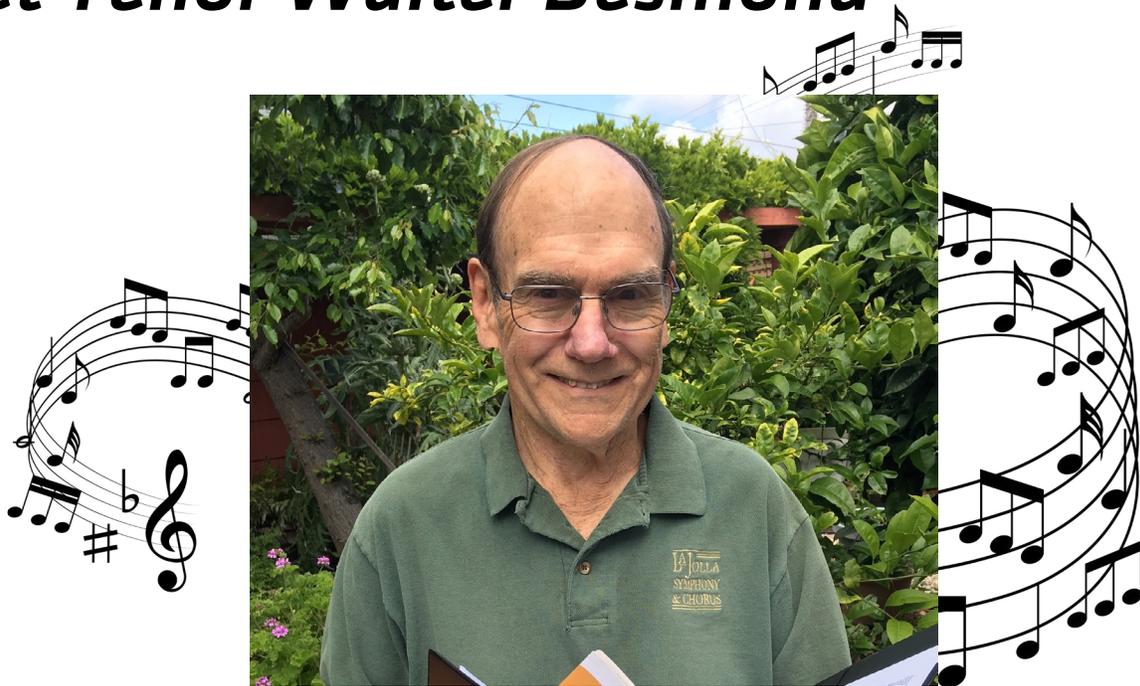
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Meet Tenor Walter Desmond



Walter Desmond is a native Californian. A musical one.

He grew up in Long Beach among a family of “enthusiastic music listeners,” as he puts it, and has been singing at least since joining the Luther Burbank Glee Club in the 6th grade. Either the club’s director or repertoire—or both—were memorable, because Walter still recalls the songs they learned.

While at the University of Notre Dame earning a chemistry degree, he joined a Gregorian Chant choir. When he moved to L.A. and San Diego for graduate and postdoctoral studies, he sang in church choirs. One day at UCSD, he was intrigued by a flyer for “an interesting-sounding choral group. I found my place,” he says, “at La Jolla Chorus.” That was 40 years ago.

His career as a biochemist changed over the years. “Cell biology research at UCSD evolved into exciting work in an early biotech company, Hybritech,” he notes. Later in life he learned about the need for improved science education, which led to “a new career managing a San Diego high school medical science program. Here supporting students’ college/career quests got me into my present retirement adventure.”

And he kept on singing. In fact he spent several years as tenor section leader for the LJS&C. Asked which works have been favorites, he says, “There are so many—“Rejoice in the Lamb” (Britten) and “Boojum” and (works by) Vaughan Williams come to mind; also the amazing variety of pieces in our tour programs.” The most difficult, he found, was Leonard Bernstein’s Symphony No. 3, the “Kaddish.” But, it, too, became a favorite.

Walt may describe himself as retired, but not many others would. He currently volunteers as a college admissions advisor for non-profit college prep programs and also for individual students who need help applying to colleges. He also volunteers with school accreditation programs, the Torrey Pines State Reserve, San Diego Catholic Worker and, of course, with various committees of the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus.

And that’s not nearly all. Here’s Walt’s list: “Also gardening; reading in a 40-year old book club; and encouraging interest in science, academics and music (to go along with athletic passions) among our 3 grandsons; and enjoying them along with our own kids—Kathleen, a high school academic dean, Michael, a tax attorney, just sworn-in as IRS Chief Counsel, and Denis, planning director for the SD Metropolitan Transit System (all veterans of LJS&C tours).”

Walter Desmond feels blessed. He describes his current life this way: “More than 50 of the above years have been enriched with the loving company and support of my wife, Ann. Now much of my retirement is cheering her on in her wide-ranging community work—including work on the LJS&C gala and auction and continuing to hear lots of music together. Singing with LJS&C has been an enlightening adventure, with all the music and musician friendships adding to many other blessings in life.”

Pat Finn



Need to contact the LJS&C?

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Diane Salisbury, Executive Director

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2019 GALA - SEPTEMBER 28
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Contributors

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From Vicki Heins-Shaw

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By Jennifer Schuessler - The New York Times

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