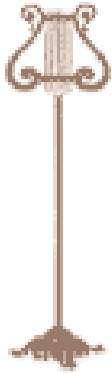


# The State College Choral Society



## NEWSLETTER

January 2005



### *From the Podium . . .*

By Russell Shelley

As Phil Klein continues to say, “I can’t believe we did that.” The *Voices of the Holocaust* experience continues to provide fulfillment in many areas. Thank you for your willingness to be adventurous on such an unknown road. As I shared at our January 17 rehearsal, we hope the future includes touching *VoH* at least one more time.

Part of the prep for *St. Paul* has included finding various program notes other choruses have produced. Below is a portion of one such example. As you have opportunity, I encourage you to spend some time Googling Mendelssohn *St. Paul*. For a more complete

Mendelssohn read, I recommend R. Larry Todd’s *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*. Todd won’t tell you this, but our own Bill Bemis once sang with the chorus that premiered *St. Paul*. Mind you, he didn’t sing the premiere—just with the choir a few years after the 1836 premiere!

Thank you for making the time to sing through each week’s rehearsal portions. Our rehearsal experience is much more productive and enjoyable as more folks are able to prepare for rehearsal. The joy of working with the State College Choral Society continues. Thank you for investing in classical choral music.

Given Mendelssohn’s high regard for the choral masterpieces of Bach, Handel and Haydn, it is no surprise to find that *St. Paul* is modeled on similar lines, with an integrated scheme of recitatives, arias and choruses. His use of chorales to demarcate important points in the story and to reflect on the action is clearly influenced by the Passion music of Bach. One of Bach’s favorite chorales, “*Wachet auf*” (“Sleepers, wake”), is heard at the very beginning of the overture and later on in the chorus. Handel’s influence is also evident in the dramatic use of the chorus, which at times is central to the action, as for instance when the outraged mob calls for Paul to be killed, whilst at other times it provides appropriate commentary on the unfolding events. Of course, the work is full of Mendelssohn’s own innovations, the most striking of which is his use of a four-part chorus of women’s voices—used only once in the whole piece—to represent the voice from heaven, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”

The text of the oratorio is based very largely on the Acts of the Apostles. After a lengthy overture, Part I opens with the martyrdom of Stephen and Saul’s persecution of the Christians. This is followed by the conversion of Paul, his baptism, and ordination as a minister by Ananias. Part II finds Paul and Barnabas becoming the ambassadors of the Church. Their duet is followed by one of the oratorio’s best-loved choruses, “How lovely are the messengers.” We then hear of the Jews’ attempted entrapment of Paul and the miraculous healing at Lystra of a crippled man. The work ends with Paul leaving his church at Ephesus and sailing for Jerusalem, and new challenges.

John Bawden  
Musical Director  
Fareham Philharmonic Choir

# the young person's guide to the chorus

In any chorus, there are four voice parts: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. Sometimes these are divided into first and second within each part, prompting endless jokes about first and second basses. There are also various other parts such as baritone, countertenor, contralto, mezzo soprano, etc., but these are mostly used by people who are either soloists, or belong to some excessively hotshot classical *a cappella* group (this applies especially to countertenors), or are trying to make excuses for not really fitting into any of the regular voice parts, so we will ignore them for now.

Each voice part sings in a different range, and each one has a very different personality. You may ask, "Why should singing different notes make people act differently?" and indeed this is a mysterious question and has not been adequately studied, especially since scientists who study musicians tend to be musicians themselves and have all the peculiar complexes that go with being tenors, french horn players, timpanists, or whatever. However, this is beside the point; the fact remains that the four voice parts can be easily distinguished, and I will now explain how.

The **SOPRANOS** are the ones who sing the highest, and because of this they think they rule the world. They have longer hair, fancier jewelry, and swishier skirts than anyone else, and they consider themselves insulted if they are not allowed to go at least to a high F in every movement of any given piece. When they reach the high notes, they hold them for at least half again as long as the composer and/or conductor requires, and then complain that their throats are killing them and that the composer and conductor are sadists. Sopranos have varied attitudes toward the other sections of the chorus, though they consider all of them inferior. Altos are to sopranos rather like second violins are to first violins—nice to harmonize with, but not really necessary. All sopranos have a secret feeling that the altos could drop out and the piece would sound essentially the same, and they don't understand why anybody would sing in that range to begin with—it's so boring. Tenors, on the other hand, can be very nice to have around; besides their flirtation possibilities (it is a well-known fact that sopranos never flirt with basses), sopranos like to sing duets with tenors because all the tenors are doing is working very hard to sing in a low-to-medium soprano range, while the sopranos are up there in the stratosphere showing off. To sopranos, basses are the scum of the earth—they sing too damn loud, are useless to tune to because they're down in that low, low range—and there has to be something wrong with anyone who sings in the F clef anyway (although they swoon while the Tenors sing, they still end up going home with the basses).

The **ALTOS** are the salt of the earth—in their opinion, at least. Altos are unassuming people, who would wear jeans to concerts if they were allowed to. Altos are in a unique position in the chorus in that they are unable to complain about having to sing either very high or very low, and they know that all the other sections think their parts are pitifully easy. But the altos know otherwise. They know that while the sopranos are screeching away on a high A, they are being forced to sing elaborate passages full of sharps and flats and tricks of rhythm, and nobody is noticing because the sopranos are singing too loud (the basses, too). Altos get a deep secret

pleasure out of conspiring together to tune the sopranos flat. Altos have an innate distrust of tenors, because the tenors sing in almost the same range and think they sound better. They like the basses, and enjoy singing duets with them—the basses just sound like a rumble anyway, and it's the only time the altos can really be heard. Altos other complaint is that there are always too many of them and so they never get to sing really loud. (*Ed. note: Soprano believes to the contrary, everyone knows ALTOS RULE.*)

The **TENORS** are spoiled. That's all there is to it. For one thing, there are never enough of them, and choir directors would rather sell their souls than let a halfway decent tenor quit, while they're always ready to unload a few altos at half price. And then, for some reason, the few tenors there are always really good—it's one of those annoying facts of life. So it's no wonder tenors always get swollen heads—after all, who else can make the sopranos swoon? The one thing that can make tenors insecure is the accusation (usually by the basses) that anyone singing that high couldn't possibly be a real man. In their usual perverse fashion, the tenors never acknowledge this, but just complain louder about the composer being a sadist and making them sing so damn high. Tenors have a love/hate relationship with the conductor, too, because the conductor is always telling them to sing louder because there are so few of them. No conductor in recorded history as ever asked for less tenor in a *forte* passage. Tenors feel threatened in some way by all the other sections—the sopranos because they can hit those incredibly high notes; the altos because they have no trouble singing the notes the tenors kill themselves for; and the basses because, although they can't sing anything above an E, they sing it loud enough to drown out the tenors. Of course tenors would rather die than admit any of this. It is a little known fact that tenors move their eyebrows more than anyone else while singing.

The **BASSES** sing the lowest of anybody. This basically explains everything. They are solid, dependable people, and have more facial hair than anybody else. The basses feel perpetually unappreciated, but they have a deep conviction that they are actually the most important part (a view endorsed by musicologists, but certainly not by sopranos or tenors), despite the fact that they have the most boring part of anybody and often sing the same note (or in endless fifths) for an entire page. They compensate for this by singing as loudly as they can get away with—most basses are tuba players at heart. They are the only section that can regularly complain about how low their part is, and they make horrible faces when trying to hit very low notes. Basses are charitable people, but their charity does not extend so far as tenors, whom they consider effete poseurs. Basses hate tuning the tenors more than almost anything else. Basses like altos—except when they have duets and the altos get the good part. As for the sopranos, they are simply in an alternate universe which the basses don't understand at all. They can't imagine why anybody would ever want to sing that high and sound that bad when they make mistakes. When a bass makes a mistake, the other three parts will cover him, and he can continue on his merry way knowing that sometime, somehow, he will end up at the root of the chord.

Thanks to Jan Hill for submitting this piece for publication.

# BUDGET CRUNCH

By Janet Haner

Another New Year, and another wonderful musical challenge with the Mendelssohn *St. Paul!* The SCCS Board and staff work very hard to make all of our concerts happen in the best way possible. Below is a basic budget for the 2004-05 year and some figures year-to-date. As you can see, while we had wonderful support for the Holocaust concert and events, the spring concert is woefully underfunded. We welcome any and all ideas on how to make up the shortfall.

Income	Budget	YTD
Development		
Holocaust	40,000	41,000
Contributions	10,000	4,500
Grants	2,300	500
Corporate Sponsorship	1,500	
Fundraising	1,000	1,500
Programs ads	3,000	1,000
Memberships	6,300	6,000
Ticket Sales		
Holocaust Concert	10,500	8,127
Madrigals	10,000	6,843
Spring Concert	10,500	
Season Tickets	300	176
Songs of the Season CD Sales	1,500	84
Interest	50	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>96,950</b>	<b>69,748</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Contracts		
Professional	16,900	8,500
Administrative	8,550	4,300
Holocaust Concert		
General	37,400	40,000
Instrumentalists/soloists	2,600	6,000
Madrigals		
General	10,000	10,000
Instrumentalists	750	1,000
Spring Concert		
General	5,000	
Instrumentalists/soloists	14,000	
Operations	6,000	3,000
Advertising	2,000	1,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>103,200</b>	<b>74,300</b>

**HELP WANTED:** Person with computer music-writing program to set words to music for a hymn using thematic material from Brahms' *First*, last movement; one verse, 32 measures in 4/4 time. Job pays \$50 plus travel expenses. Contact John Craeger at email [jcreag@worldnet.att.net](mailto:jcreag@worldnet.att.net).

# ACAPPELLA

By Pat Daniels



he *Voices of the Holocaust* concert last fall and the *St. Paul* concert this spring highlight two different and equally important parts of the Choral Society's mission. In *Voices of the Holocaust*, not only did we add an important piece to the choral repertoire, but we also set a new standard for ourselves in working with the community, reaching out to educate and to learn from a new audience. In our spring concert, we return to our traditional choral roots. The classic oratorios are the masterworks of the choral art, but many communities will never hear them because they are simply too expensive, requiring an orchestra, soloists, and a large performing space. The Choral Society is committed to bringing one of these bigger concerts to State College at least every couple of years, so all of us have to work together to pull it off without breaking the bank. Here's what we need to do:

- 1) Learn the music
- 2) Sing it well
- 3) Sell program ads
- 4) Sell lots of tickets
- 5) Sell lots of tickets
- 6) Sell lots of tickets

If we all bring the same passion and commitment to *St. Paul* that we brought to *Voices of the Holocaust*, we'll be home free.

## *Please get well soon...*

LES DOREMUS, tenor, is laid up at HealthSouth—cards for him may be sent to 550 West College Avenue, Pleasant Gap, PA 16823. His phone there is 359-3421.

Bass BILL MUZZY is at home recovering from quintuple bypass surgery. Mail cards to 1310 Andover Drive, Boalsburg, PA 16827, email him at [wmuzzy@adelphia.net](mailto:wmuzzy@adelphia.net), or call his cell phone, 404-2177.

DAN MOERDYK, also a bass, recently had surgery on his arm, but expects to be back with us soon. Send cards to him at 177 Rimmey Road, Centre Hall, PA 16828.

## *Farewell...*

Tenor section leader ED NOVISTKY and his bride, soprano CHIEKO (KOB) NOVITSKY must bid SCCS a fond farewell: Ed recently finished his studies at Penn State and has accepted a job in California. They will be moving in March. We will certainly miss them, in Madrigals as well as Choral Society proper. We wish them and their new little one (due any day!) all the best.



# ON ROSE MADRIGALS

Thanks to Ymene Fouli for sharing her photos.



Juggler Bob Yuncken



The 2004 Madrigal Singers finish the evening in style



Annelies, Justin, Dave, Angela, and Carolyn



Radiantly pregnant Chieko with new hubby Ed



Harpist Sarah White