

Rocks of Gibraltar

-Recollections of Bill Gadzuk: February, 2014-

Well it all goes back to the early years of Masterworks Chorus, born in 1974 (becoming the National Philharmonic Chorale in 2004) with Roger Ames our founding director. Roger was exquisitely talented at making "doing music" a totally joyful experience and as a result, he seemed to be loved by all who were musically connected with him. Rather ironically, Masterworks was originally a spinoff of the Montgomery County Recreation Department's *Street 70* program based in the Roundhouse Theater then headed by Eliot Pfanstiehl and here we are 40 years later "living" in Strathmore headed by the same Eliot. In those early days one of the most inescapable defining aspects of the chorus was that it really belonged to and was completely run by the members and a board of directors chosen by and from the pool of active singers. For example, we the chorus hired music directors, paid the orchestra, rented the rehearsal and performance venues, schlepped risers and music stands around, and took care of all other sorts of administrative details that nowadays seem to be taken care of automatically. This happy current reality is a result of dedicated chorale volunteers working hundreds of hours together with the National Philharmonic staff on behalf of the organization.

An early trauma (to be experienced a few more times in the coming years) came when, after three years of joyful music with Roger, he submitted his resignation in order to join his wife who was based in Europe singing with the Köln opera. So we were thrust into our first search for someone to replace our "irreplaceable" founding father. Very fortunately we were able to engage the promising young Edward Polochick to serve as the second music director of Masterworks, his term starting in the fall of 1978. Ed was Philadelphia and (mainly) Baltimore-centered, having graduated from Swarthmore and then Peabody Conservatory, having been mentored by Leon Fleischer, and having conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra. Eddie's charm and talent made it much easier to adjust to Roger's departure. New human chemistry was established between music director and chorus members resulting in some realignment in the intra-chorus "power structure", a phenomenon that will be revisited. We had but two glorious years with Ed up to mid-1980 before he returned to his Baltimore home base as director of the

Baltimore Symphony Orchestra Chorus, as a faculty member at Peabody, and as an important member of the Baltimore musical community where he later founded the renowned *Concert Artists of Baltimore*. Parenthetically it is interesting to note that in recent years Ed has conducted BSO performances of the *Messiah* at Strathmore on weekends adjacent to our own Strathmore *Messiahs*.

Of course Eddie's departure once again put us in search of a new leader and this time we struck at rich near home with the elegant Jeffrey Rink, a prodigy of the legendary Paul Traver at the University of Maryland. The period 1980-81, Jeff's first season with us, was again marked by a reorientation of people chemistry and chorus-music director loyalties. Jeff was Masterworks third music director in less than three years and this contributed to a certain sense of structural fragility within the organization. Nonetheless we moved forward during Jeff's first year with a board of directors that was formed throughout the Polochick era, some happier than others with the new environment under Jeff. In addition to changed personal style, a significant area of conflict arose over the selection of rehearsal pianists. Throughout Eddie's reign and Jeff's first year we had an accompanist who, while well qualified, appeared to be the handpicked choice of some dominant members of the board. By the end of Jeff's first year he made it known that he would like to select a new accompanist, a very talented young doctoral candidate also from the University of Maryland who he was very impressed with. This seemed to be a very reasonable request; but not in the eyes of some (predictable) members of the board.

Now for conflict resolution. As was the custom at that time, the board meetings were frequently held at various members homes. Our Summer-of-81 meeting in which new officers would be chosen/elected was expected to be somewhat contentious due to the pianist controversy. The meeting was to be held on a steamy July night at the Gaithersburg home of board-member Tom Courtless. And steamy it quickly became. The most experienced board members who, by universal consent, were expected to serve as president and VP were also uncompromisingly supportive of the rehearsal pianist we had been using. There was no way that they would consider Jeff's candidate. Somehow we convened a meeting in which an inexperienced majority of the board but not the

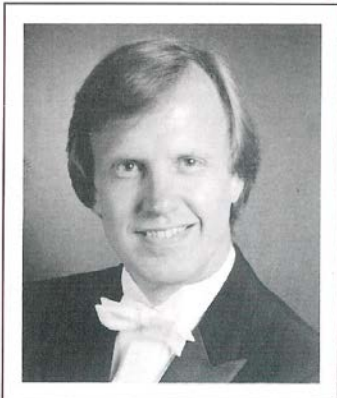
anticipated officers firmly favored going with Jeff's recommendation for the new accompanist from UMd. You don't chose a leader (Jeff) and then deny him/her the tools and personnel they need to carry out their mission. With this tentative decision, the meeting turned chaotic ending with the senior leadership, the presumed President and Veep dramatically quitting the chorus and board and then stomping out of our world forever. This seemed to put us in definite death throes as an organization since the senior leadership that we were depending upon had just abandoned us and certainly none of the remaining four or five of us considered ourselves prepared for the responsibilities of maintaining the operation of a chorus. I don't remember exactly how we ended the meeting nor what was decided concerning what next? What I do remember though is being out in Tom's driveway with Helen Altman where we kept replaying to ourselves what just happened and asking each other "what do we do now?" One thing was crystal clear; if we answered "nothing" then Masterworks was history. In spite of our own personal fears and other hesitancies, the two of us decided that this was the ultimate moment of truth and either we had to dive in or watch Masterworks cease to exist. So we decided to go for it. We appointed ourselves co-presidents, then scheduled another board meeting, made some plans for replacing our just-departed board members, and informed Jeff that he should proceed with engaging his/our new pianist. With our blessings, Jeff was able to offer the rehearsal pianist job to his friend at UMd. He accepted and Ted Guerrant has been with us ever since. Bless you Jeff for this glorious lasting legacy. And that is how our first Rock of Gibraltar came to be.

Armed with what seems like the world's finest rehearsal pianist, we made music. One of the most memorable periods of Jeff's reign was the celebration of Masterworks 10th anniversary in the 1984-85 season in which we commissioned and performed (to critical acclaim) *Requiem for Unbelievers* composed by our founding director Roger Ames. Seven current members of NPC performed the Requiem. However we were again to discover that good things come to an end. After six seasons with us, Jeff moved on to Boston in the summer of 1986 to become the Assistant Conductor of the Handel and Haydn Society under Christopher Hogwood, their new conductor.

Back to the hunt. The changing of the guard at Boston's HHS meant that there could be a former assistant conductor available and sure enough, after an extensive at-large search for the best, we found him, one William Jon Gray. Bill came to Masterworks from the HHS in September, 1986 and brought with him a unique sense of scholarly correctness in "doing" music. He hand-copied all our music complete with textual, musical, and interpretative annotations that were then photocopied and distributed. He was particularly interested in us performing a number of different "historically accurate" versions of the *Messiah* over the course of his directorship. [which we did]. This was a memorable undertaking not just because of the artistic achievement but also because of the physical challenges. "Historically accurate" means amongst other things, uncut [i.e. long] and these performances were done in our earlier days upon portable risers [with no chairs] which meant standing for the entire unabridged performance; truly memorable! Bill's final performance with Masterworks was titled *Coronation Spectacular*, performed on June 2, 1993 in the Washington National Cathedral on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The rich entirety of the music from the Coronation was offered. This was a spectacular end to Bill's seven years with us as he moved on to Indiana University for doctoral studies in music where he is currently on the music faculty as chair of the choral department. He has also been associated with the Carmel Bach Festival.

Once again, the fifth time in Masterworks twenty year existence, we were faced with uncertainty/challenge/opportunity as we hit the proverbial pavement in search of THE right music director, one who would bring with him/her, not only the musical and organizational talents that we so much desired and needed, but also a long-term end to the *certain sense of structural fragility within the organization* that we have lived with for too long. A suggestive indicator of the stability we so much wanted would be the potential director's commitment and ties to the Washington area beyond those provided solely by Masterworks. Did we ever strike at rich when we discovered Stan Engebretson; sturdy Scandinavian raised in North Dakota, Stanford doctorate in music, varied teaching and conducting experience before dropping anchor in Washington. And what a solid anchor; head of choral studies at George Mason University, Director of Music at the

historic New York Avenue Presbyterian Church for starters. Stan was our dream come true. He accepted our offer and now, on the occasion of his 20th year with us, it is clear that our dream has been sustained. And as an added cause for celebration, this is also the chorale's 40th anniversary which means that Stan and we have been together for more than half of the chorale's existence, longer than the sum total of the years under the previous four music directors combined. Talk about solid stability, it doesn't get any better than this.



Masterworks

Chorus and Orchestra
Dr. Stanley Engebretson, *Artistic Director*

All Mozart Concert

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Washington, D.C.
Saturday, November 6, 1993 at 8:00 pm
Nineteenth Season


Anne Pemberton Johnson, *soprano* Roberts M. Petillo, *tenor*
Molly Donnelly, *mezzo soprano* James Shaffran, *bass-baritone*
Theodore Guerrant, *organ*
Masterworks Chorus and Orchestra
Dr. Stanley Engebretson, *conductor*

MOZART *Coronation Mass (Krönungs — Messe) K. 317*
Kyrie
Gloria
MOZART *Sonata all'epistola, K. 224*
Credo
Sanctus
Benedictus
Agnus Dei

INTERMISSION

MOZART *Exsultate, Jubilate (Motet) K. 165*
MOZART *Vespers solennes de confesseur K. 339*
Dixit
Confitebor
Beatus vir
Laudate pueri
Laudate Dominum
Magnificat

Our memorable life with Stan began with our maiden voyage on November 6, 1993, Mozart at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, more-or-less our de facto home performance venue for many years. Hmm, the memories not only of the great music but also the fighting Friday afternoon rush-hour traffic to get risers down to St. Paul's in time for the evening final rehearsal. Certain aspects of the good-old-days were less than good.



"In Search of Peace"

The 50th Anniversary of D Day

Wednesday, June 1, 1994, at 8 p.m.
Washington National Cathedral
Massachusetts & Wisconsin Aves., NW

BERNSTEIN Chichester Psalms

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Dona nobis pacem

ALAIN Litanies

With the Montgomery County Youth Chorus, Everett Williams, Conductor

Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the invasion at Normandy on June 6, 1943, this event will be an international, multi-cultural concert for world peace. Leonard Bernstein's Chichester Psalms, sung in Hebrew and performed in memory of the victims of the holocaust, contrast in exuberant celebration of life and peace with the cruelty of war. Vaughan Williams' *Dona nobis pacem*, set to a moving text by Walt Whitman when England was on the brink of entering the war, is a thrilling and compassionate cry for reconciliation. French composer Jehan Alain, killed in the front lines of WW II is represented by his moving work for organ, Litanies. The program will also include music of Russian and African American composers.

The past twenty years have supplied many great memories. A few more not-so-routine ones I share with you now. Perhaps the emotionally most meaningful one [at least for me] occurred at the end of Stan's first year, our *In Search of Peace* concert in the Washington National Cathedral on June 4, 1994, the 50th Anniversary of D-Day. Here are Stan's words in the program:

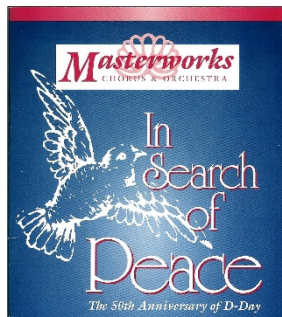
From the Conductor

Welcome to tonight's concert, a special event for all of us gathering to remember those who fought during World War II and those who were involved in the D-Day operations.

All of us here tonight have some connection with this event that happened fifty years ago, either directly or indirectly. My association is a personal one, as my mother's brother was killed during the invasion, which had a profound effect upon our family throughout the years. I know that many of you also have first-hand memories from this time, which will be recalled as you view this performance. Let us never forget our search for peace nor those who gave their lives for the cause.

Dona nobis pacem.

Stan Engebretsen



Who amongst us could ever forget the thrill of performing the Verdi Requiem in the mighty National Building Museum? We did it on May 10, 1997 joined by Stan's George Mason Symphony Chorus and it was as exciting as you could imagine, challenging acoustics notwithstanding.



world premiere performance of
AN AMERICAN CANTATA

An American Cantata, composed by Maury Yeston for 2000 voices and orchestra, was commissioned by The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as part of our Millennium Season. The choral forces will be made up of a mixed chorus of 1600, a gospel chorus of 200 and a children's chorus of 200 voices.

The performance celebrates our inherent and universal right to individual liberty and equality of all men and women—our civilization's single greatest intellectual accomplishment of the past thousand years.

Leonard Slatkin, Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra, will conduct the NSO and an extraordinary and unprecedented choral force of 2000 voices from over 100 area choruses. The world premiere performance will be held on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on July 1, 2000.

2000 VOICES
BY MAURY YESTON

NSO
NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
LEONARD SLATKIN, MUSIC DIRECTOR

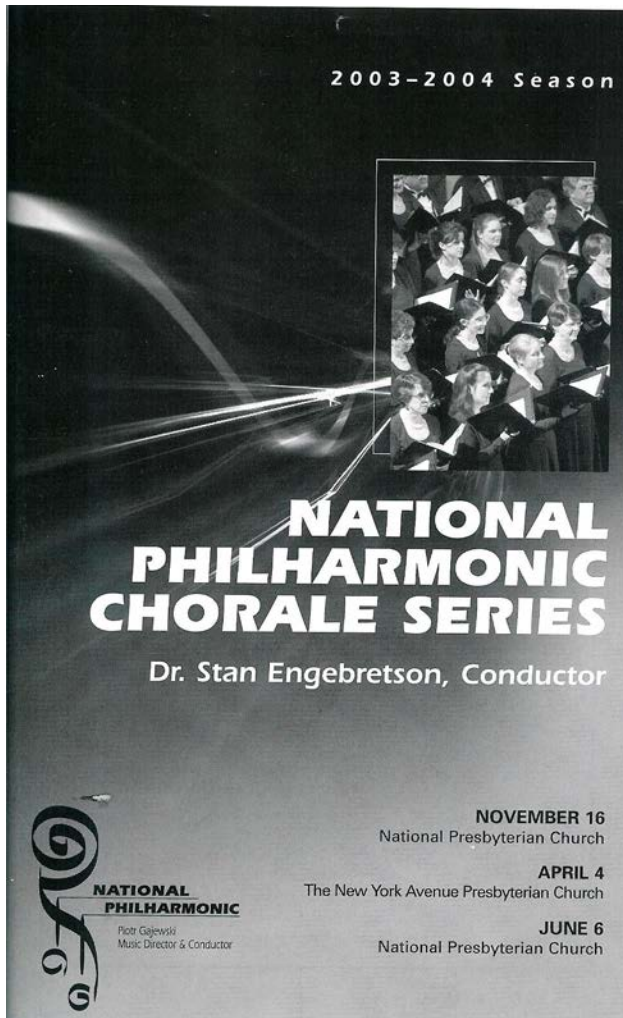
ON THE STEPS OF THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL
Saturday, July 1, 2000
9:00 p.m.

FREE TO THE PUBLIC
Visit the *American Cantata* website
kennedy-center.org/2000voices

Perhaps the most widely anticipated period of our times was that of Year 2000. Events throughout that year permeated all aspects of our lives and music was no exception. One of the great Washington shows was the world premiere [and likely only] performance of *An American Cantata*, *2000 Voices*, with the 2000 voice chorus performing from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial with Leonard Slatkin and the National Symphony on the 4th of July weekend. Can you think of a more quintessentially American thing to do? The chorus was a composite of many Washington area groups that rehearsed in several different

locations. Many of us Masterworks singers participated, rehearsing at Walter Johnson High before our big debut on the Mall. A great and festive time was had by all. Who knows what would have happened if there had been a not-unusual July thunderstorm?

Little did we realize what totally game-changing developments were on the Masterworks/Montgomery County musical horizon in the new millennium. Masterworks Chorus along with the National Chamber Orchestra under the direction of Piotr Gajewski, were invited to become one of the arts organizations in residence at the soon to be built Music Center at Strathmore, expected to be in operation in early 2005. The idea for a new organization, a merger of the Masterworks Chorus and the National Chamber Orchestra, grew out of discussions between the two Artistic Directors, Piotr Gajewski and Stan. Following months of hard work and negotiations by a joint executive committee composed of members of both performing groups, the merger was completed. On July 1, 2003 the National Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorale was created. We were introduced



to the world as the National Philharmonic Chorale in our 2003-2004 season through a three-concert series, two performed in our oft-used National Presbyterian Church. Of particular note was our presentation of Dvorak's *Stabat Mater* on April 4, 2004 at Stan's New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. This was a wonderfully unique experience since very few of us not only had never heard or performed it but we did not even know of its existence. We thank you Professor Stan for this joyful lesson. On June 6, 2004 we once again paid tribute to D-Day, now on its 60th anniversary, with a near duplication of our moving 1994 program. *Dona Nobis Pacem*

THE MUSIC CENTER AT STRATHMORE
MARRIOTT CONCERT STAGE

FEBRUARY 12, 2005
8 p.m.

NATIONAL PHILHARMONIC
Piotr Gajewski Music Director & Conductor
Stan Engebretson Chorale Artistic Director
GALA AT STRATHMORE

Piotr Gajewski	<i>Conductor</i>
Cokie Roberts	<i>Narrator</i>
Janice Chandler-Etme	<i>Soprano</i>
Patricia Miller	<i>Alto</i>
John Aler	<i>Tenor</i>
Kevin Deas	<i>Bass</i>

National Philharmonic Chorale
Stan Engebretson *Artistic Director*

National Anthem	The Star-Spangled Banner
Andreas Makris (born 1930)	Strathmore Overture (World Premiere)
Aaron Copland (1900-1990)	Lincoln Portrait

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)	Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, Op. 125, "Choral" Allegro ma non troppo; un poco maestoso Molto Vivace Adagio molto e cantabile; Andante moderato Presto; Allegro assai
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Thanks to the 2004-2005 sponsors who have made this occasion possible: Aspen Systems Corporation; BAE Systems; Comcast; Discovery Communications; The Gazette; Lockheed Martin Corporation; Shulman Rogers Gandal Pordy & Ecker, P.A.; and Verizon.

On February 12, 2005, we performed the Beethoven 9th Symphony as part of the National Philharmonic debut in Strathmore. Little did we realize that we would be doing a repeat at the gala Ten Year Anniversary of Strathmore in February, 2015. What a ten-year fantasy trip this has been with Stan at the helm waving the stick.



We've established a yearly December Strathmore Holiday tradition. Our multiple sold out *Messiah* performances have brought holiday joy to thousands of happy concert goers each year who eagerly look forward to a return next year.

We have come to really feel family with some of our favorite choral giants that we have performed a number of times such that they can almost be thought of as repertory: of course the *Messiah*, then Mozart, Brahms, and Verdi *Requiems*, *Carmina Burana*, the 9th, *Lord Nelson Mass*, the *Magnificat*, and dare I suggest, Bach's *B Minor Mass*. There are so many one-timers we've done that hopefully will someday also be part of our repertory family. How about the *Creation*, *St. Matthew Passion*, *Missa Solemnis*, *Elijah*, *Berlioz Requiem*, Britten's *War Requiem*, and Mozart's *Coronation and Great Masses*?



The joy and satisfaction that we and our audiences have experienced over the past twenty years, the most recent ten in our world-class concert hall/musical home, have been a gift given to us from music, the music “gods”, and from those who made it possible for all of us to participate, no matter which side of the stage you’re on. While only a few of us have had the opportunity to work with most of Masterworks/National Philharmonic Chorale’s music directors, one thing for sure is that we [and a vast array of “alums”] all have been privileged to make music under Stan’s guidance and this has been a great experience. As we became painfully aware as the early decades of Masterworks played out, in addition to being an inspirational and talented musician, a sine qua non for achieving the stability required to grow a chorus such as we have become, is a long-term commitment/involvement from the music director. Stan, you have served us well for twenty years plus which, in this 40th year of the chorale makes you our newest Rock of Gibraltar, standing tall by the side of our first Rock, Ted Guarrant and also with Vicki Gau, likely one of our next Rocks of Gibraltar.

Dona Nobis Pacem



J. William Gadzuk
National Philharmonic Chorale and Board of Directors
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