

The Chorus is Moving to a New Beat

By Dorothy A. Voight



This year promises to be an exciting one for the CBA Chorus. We're auditioning three candidates for the position of new CBA Chorus director because Rebecca Patterson, our director from the chorus's inception in 2006, retired at the end of the 2015–2016 season.

The Chicago Bar Association boasts one of the most robust avocational music programs in the country, offering a chorus, symphony orchestra, big band and chamber music ensembles. Members of the legal community have many opportunities to join other members in performing music in various ways. The CBA Chorus usually performs classical choral works with the CBA Orchestra, such as the Brahms Requiem, but has also performed with piano accompaniment or a cappella.

The mission and purpose of the CBA Chorus is to: 1) Promote and enhance the public's understanding and image of The Chicago Bar Association by sharing the musical excellence of its members; 2)

Attract new members to the CBA by offering opportunities for civic involvement and artistic expression; 3) Promote civic service among CBA members; 4) Provide an opportunity for CBA members to exchange ideas and information through interaction in a social setting; and 5) Be a counterpart to the Chicago Bar Association Symphony Orchestra.

David Katz, founding music director of the Chicago Bar Association Symphony Orchestra said "When I asked Becky Patterson to form a CBA Chorus for performances of the Beethoven 9th Symphony ten years ago, I never imagined that the group would continue beyond those concerts to become an integral part of the Chicago Bar Association's musical life. Now that Becky has retired, we are in the midst of a most important search—to find just the right individual to lead the CBA Chorus into its second decade with the same dedication and skill. It is an exciting time. I can't wait for the season to start."

After learning that Rebecca Patterson planned to retire in May 2016, the chorus formed a search committee spearheaded by CBA Orchestra conductor, Maestro David Katz. The many applications received were narrowed down to three well-qualified finalists.

Each finalist will prepare the chorus for a concert over the coming year. Chorus members and Maestro Katz will get a sense of what each finalist's directing style and personality is like during this trial period in order to determine who will be the best fit.

At the end of the season, we'll select one finalist to be our permanent chorus director. Chorus members, the orchestra and even audiences will be asked for input.

Our three finalists are:

Stephen Blackwelder who is currently Music Director of the Waukegan Symphony and Director of the DePaul Community Chorus;

Christopher Windle who is the Concert

Choir Conductor and an Instructor at Benedictine University in Lisle, an adjunct instructor at Northwestern University's Beinen School of Music in Evanston, and Assistant Choirmaster of the Church of the Atonement in Chicago; and.

Dr. Christopher Owen who is the Director of Choral Activities and Assistant Professor of Music Education at Northeastern Illinois University.

Each will make his pitch for the director position by preparing a piece for the chorus to sing with the orchestra, and will also direct additional choral selections which the chorus will perform with piano only or a cappella.

First is Stephen Blackwelder's chance to shine, with works by Handel, Fauré and Mahler on November 16, 2016. The second concert, where we'll perform "Mostly Mozart" will be on March 8, 2017, and will be led by Christopher Windle. The third concert featuring works by Tchaikovsky and Vaughan Williams will be on May 17, 2017, and will be Christopher Owen's opportunity to work with the chorus.

In addition to these concerts with our director candidates, chorus members will participate in a chamber concert on September 16 at the Cliff Dwellers Club, with different ensembles and soloists from the CBA Symphony Orchestra and Chorus in a program of instrumental and vocal selections.

We're looking for additional singers in all sections to join the chorus. There's no need to audition, though potential members should have choral experience and be prepared to sing to an audience. If you find singing relaxing and enjoyable, and are free Wednesday evenings from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., then you're the kind of person the chorus needs. Some members practice law to make a living, but we live to sing. Most chorus members are attorneys, judges, law students, paralegals, legal assistants, and secretaries, but we also have educators, realtors and persons in other professions. Some are accomplished musicians, but many are enthusiastic amateurs who are more familiar with statutes than staccatos.

Co-chair Rebecca Burlingham reminds us that "[T]he members of the CBA Chorus come from a variety of backgrounds and have a variety of interests, but they are all united by their love of singing and performing choral music. The great personal enjoyment it brings to them, and the camaraderie and energy of our group, keep them coming back year after year. At the end of each season, we look ahead with great interest and anticipation to the new experiences and challenges, and the unique musical opportunities, next season will bring."

Co-chair Terry Kennedy notes the professional networking opportunities that the Chorus provides and enjoys the social aspects of the Chorus, as well as the musical challenges.

Retiring director Rebecca Patterson says "Leading this extraordinary group has been a real privilege. There's a great spirit of camaraderie, and a dedication to excellence, and we also enjoyed a whole lot of fun in rehearsals and in performance."

If you can't sing, but enjoy music, please attend the concerts and provide your input on the director choice from an audience member's perspective. We perform at St. James Episcopal Cathedral, located at 65 E. Huron Street in Chicago.

Thanks to the chorus's volunteer leadership and Maestro Katz, the chorus and orchestra have performed two concerts at Chicago's esteemed Symphony Center. The first was Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* in 2011 to mark the CBA Symphony Orchestra's 25th anniversary and the CBA Chorus's 5th anniversary. The second was *Something Wonderful: The Music of Rodgers and Hammerstein*, a custom program of songs only the CBA groups had permission to perform on April 26, 2015.

In 2010, the Chorus serenaded retiring Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens at a gala at the Chicago Hilton. The chorus has performed at Law Day events, holiday concerts at the Harold Washington Library and Navy Pier, and sang the National Anthem at US Cellular Field.

The CBA Chorus has also seized the opportunity to do some touring. In February 2013, the chorus and select members of

the CBA Symphony Orchestra travelled to Springfield, Illinois to present *Lincoln and His America: A Musical Celebration*. This concert of Lincoln-era songs, instrumental works and narrative readings from the Civil War era was performed at historic Representative Hall in the Old State Capitol, where Abraham Lincoln once served.

In March 2014, the CBA Chorus went to New York to join the New York City Bar Chorus for a program of popular American songs in the historic New York City Bar Association Building. In November 2015, the New York City Bar Chorus came to Chicago to join the CBA Chorus in concert. The chorus looks forward to other opportunities to sing around the country.

Over the years, the CBA Chorus has sung in English, Latin, Italian, German, Spanish, French, Medieval English, Russian, Huron Indian, Quichua Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian and more.

As we move forward, we won't lament the loss of our former director, but will carry on her legacy as we begin our overture to a new era that will lead us to higher levels and challenge our abilities. The CBA Chorus intends to remain a dynamic part of the musical and legal community and invites you to support us as we move to a new beat. ■

(Dorothy A. Voight was assisted by Rebecca Burlingham and Ruth Kaufman in writing this article)

For more information about the CBA Chorus, visit the CBA's website (under the Services tab/Entertainment/Music/Chorus.