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# The Chorus Newsletter

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[www.nvcc.edu/alexandria/visual/music](http://www.nvcc.edu/alexandria/visual/music)

## A Sea Symphony

The NOVA Community Chorus is ready to set sail on a voyage of wondrous delight.

The composer Ralph Vaughn Williams has taken the poetry of Walt Whitman as inspiration for a musical tribute to those who sail the oceans of the world.

Written at a time when the world knew nothing of nuclear powered aircraft carriers that can stay asea for months at a time without concern for fuel or fair winds, but solely for food for the crew, Whitman extolled the courage, the daring, the bravery of those who climbed the masts, lashed sails to yard arms, braved the gales and icy rigging on ships beating their way south of Tierra del Fuego.

Williams captures the excitement and wonder of the voyages, and the sea itself in this marvelous tone poem. Singing A Sea Symphony will become one of the fondest memories that choristers will retain of their life with the Community Chorus.

## Welcome to the Spring Semester

We welcome returning singers and those who have just become members this semester. You will find that our rehearsals are enjoyable, not only because of the friendliness of the members, but also because of the quality of support we receive from Chris Hagan, our accompanist, and Fred Wulff, our stage manager. We depend on Fred to organize our logistics and to prepare learning aids for us, the CDs and tapes that we use for learning the music.

Peggy Harrison, soprano section leader keeps us informed on schedule changes and other matters that require faster notice than the monthly Newsletter would provide. She needs your e-mail address so that you can be added to the list of recipients.

New members should remember to bring a pencil with them to rehearsal so that they can mark their scores. Dr. Whitmire will give us specific guidance on how he wishes us to sing. Marking your scores will help you to remember.

Next page!

**Musical  
Humor**

**The  
Tenor**



## MUSICAL HUMOR

"My sole inspiration is a telephone call from a producer." -- Cole Porter

"[Musicians] talk of nothing but money and jobs. Give me businessmen every time. They really are interested in music and art." -- Jean Sibelius, explaining why he rarely invited musicians to his home.

"The amount of money one needs is terrifying..." -- Ludwig van Beethoven

"Chaos is a friend of mine." -- Bob Dylan

"I am not handsome, but when women hear me play, they come crawling to my feet." -- Niccolò Paganini

"What is the voice of song, when the world lacks the ear of taste?" -- Nathaniel Hawthorne

"Flint must be an extremely wealthy town: I see that each of you bought two or three seats." -- Victor Borge, playing to a half-filled house in Flint, Michigan.

"Life can't be all bad when for ten dollars you can buy all the Beethoven sonatas and listen to them for ten years." - William F. Buckley, Jr.

"You can't possibly hear the last movement of Beethoven's Seventh and go slow." -- Oscar Levant, explaining his way out of a speeding ticket.

"Wagner's music is better than it sounds." -- Mark Twain "

From the Web

## The Tenor

Tenors have been unfairly subjected significant abuse over the years. They have been the object of a multitude of jokes. Yet, is there anything quite so exciting as the tenor voice in full flight? Consider the meltingly beautiful Mozart tenor arias, or the thrillingly heroic outpourings of a Verdi tenor. Indeed, the tenor voice is the historic foundation of the modern SATB choral structure typical of Western music.

The use of the term *tenor* emerged with the development of polyphonic music around the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century in a musical genre referred to as *organum*. Its roots lay in monophonic Gregorian Chant. The first step was the addition of another voice singing in parallel fourths or fifths above the Gregorian melody. As the added line gained rhythmic and melodic independence, the Gregorian melody, called the *cantus firmus*, was sung in long, sustained notes by singers who "held" the original Gregorian melody. Hence the name *tenor* from the Latin *tenere* (to hold).

At this early stage, the term did not denote a particular vocal range. Indeed, it was usually the lowest vocal part. As other independent vocal lines were added above and especially below the *cantus firmus* line, the vocal part settled into the range we now associate with it, the highest male vocal line in choral music. Yet, until some point in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when concert pitch settled at its present A4 = 440, the effective tenor range was lower than it is today. The modern choral tenor range is approximately from the second B below Middle C to the first A above it. Bach and Handel rarely ask their choral tenors to sing higher than the G above Middle C, while Beethoven expects a clarion A in the 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony. Vaughan Williams calls for the B above that in *A Sea Symphony*.

Operatic tenors are frequently expected to the scale the heights up to "High C", the C above Middle C. Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, operatic tenors would have sung the G above Middle C in falsetto. Rossini wrote the tenor parts in his operas, such as *The Barber of Seville*, for this kind of voice. In about 1840, the French tenor Gilbert Duprez introduced to Paris the full voice High C he had learned in Italy. Until the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the career of Enrico Caruso, operatic tenors continued to use falsetto for their highest notes. Since then, however, operatic tenors have been expected to deliver their highest notes full voice. Operatic tenors are classified by the weight and color of their voices: light—Count Almaviva in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*; lyric—the Duke in Verdi's *Rigoletto*; spinto—Rodolfo in Puccini's *La Bohème*; dramatic—Radamés in Verdi's *Aida*; and heroic—Tristan in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.

Oh, by the way, Franz Schubert was a tenor

Contributed by Bill Brown, bass

The Chorus Newsletter welcomes news, articles and photographic contributions. Are you planning a recital? Tell us when and where and we will get the word out. Call the editor, Bob Trexler at 703 978-9171 or e-mail at [Rctrex@aol.com](mailto:Rctrex@aol.com).

The Chorus Newsletter contains information about and for members of the NOVA Community Chorus. It is privately published monthly except during June and July. The College has no responsibility for its content. Members are encouraged to contribute articles and news about musical offerings and musical topics to Robert Trexler, editor and publisher, at [Rctrex@aol.com](mailto:Rctrex@aol.com)