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# The Chorus Newsletter

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## Washington Metropolitan Philharmonic

On April 1, 2008, the Nova Community Chorus sang its first rehearsal with the Washington Metropolitan Philharmonic at the Schlesinger Concert venue that we love.

To let the semi-chorus to sing as an ensemble, Dr. Whitmire arranged them to be at the center of the chorus and grouped so that they supported each other. This made it obvious to the audience which choristers were singing.

The orchestra tended to be louder than necessary, although Dr. Whitmire suggested that the dynamic marking should be interpreted as two less than indicated. Brass players have trouble doing that, especially when the music is so inspirational.

## Sea Symphony Rehearsals

I don't know about you, but I am getting very excited about the performance of Ralph Vaughn Williams's *A Sea Symphony*. As you know, it was his Symphony No. 1. The poetry of Walt Whitman seems to be the inspiration for this work. Whitman wrote much, but the selections that Williams used as the basis for the four movements of his symphony are truly awesome.

We gathered together on Saturday to sing our first of the weekend rehearsals. It was a good rehearsal in that we touched up some of the parts that needed more work.

We heard our soloists, Jennifer Lopez and Rex Gori sing during the rehearsal that we had on Sunday evening, 30 March 2008. The beautiful duets these singers presented to us were a portent of what the audience will experience as we perform the work for them in the Schlesinger Center on 13 April 2008 and in the Church of the Epiphany in Washington, DC on 20 April 2008.

When the soloists were singing with the full chorus, I felt the majesty of the work unfolding. Just imagine what it will be like when the voices of the orchestra blend with us and support us.

This will be one of the most exciting performances of this season. It is one that will be long remembered

I am happy to be a part of it and to share it with my friends a neighbors to whom I have sold tickets and promoted it vigorously.

Bob Trexler

## Annual Picnic

Save Saturday afternoon, May 10, for our annual chorus picnic.

It is a pot luck affair in my big yard.

Maps and directions will be provided.

This year it is late enough for the trees and shrubs to be in bloom.

Fred



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## MUSICAL HUMOR

# The Bass

ACCIDENTALS: wrong notes  
 AGITATO: one's state of mind when a peg slips in the middle of a piece  
 AUGMENTED FIFTH: a 36-ounce bottle  
 BREVE: the way a sustained note sounds when you run out of bow  
 CADENCE: when everybody hopes you're going to stop, but you don't  
 FINAL CADENCE: when they force you to stop  
 COUNTERTENOR: a singing waiter  
 CUT TIME: when you're going twice as fast as everybody else  
 ESTAMPIE: what you put on letters in Quebec  
 FINE: that sounded just great!  
 DA CAPO AL FINE: I like your hat!  
 HEMIOLA: an hereditary blood disease caused by chromatics  
 MINNESINGER: a boy soprano  
 MUSICA FICTA: when you lose your place and have to bluff the notes  
 PIZZICATO: a small Italian pie garnished with cheese  
 POSITION: acrobatics needed to play the viol  
 IMPOSITION: being forced to play above the top frets  
 INDISPOSITION: selling the viol and buying a recorder  
 QUAVER: beginning viols  
 SEMI-QUAVER: intermediate viols  
 RUBATO: German measles  
 SUPERTONIC: Schweppes  
 DIATONIC: Low-calorie Schweppes  
 VIBRATO: the villain in Handel's oratorio *Arpeggio et Tessitura*

From the Web

As independent vocal lines, the ancestors of our soprano and alto parts, were being added above the *cantus firmus* during the later Middle Ages, musicians also added a part below the original Gregorian chant melody. In time it came to be referred to as the bass, from the Italian *basso* (low) and the Latin *bassus* (short, low). Then, during the Baroque Era, as vertical harmony replaced polyphony as the primary unifying musical structure, this lower part emerged as the foundation on which the upper voices were built.

The voices associated with this lower line came to be called bass, as well. The range of the typical choral bass extends from the second F below middle C to the first E above it. Of course, composers have frequently extended this range. In Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony, basses are expected to sing a string of Fs above middle C at full voice; Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony* asks basses to sing that same note. At the nether end of the range, Vaughan Williams asks basses to sing the second D below middle C, Bach's Cantata 106 asks for the C below that, while Rachmaninoff famously calls for the B-flat below that.

As with the other voices, solo basses are classified in various ways depending on range and vocal color. Today basses are generally classified as either *basso cantante* (singing bass) or *basso profondo* (deep bass). The *basso cantante* is somewhat lighter and employs a somewhat higher range than the *basso profondo* although the two overlap in both regards. Typical *basso cantante* operatic roles would include Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, which can also be sung by a baritone, and Figaro in the Marriage of Figaro, King Philip in Verdi's *Don Carlo*, and the title role in Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. *Basso profondo* roles would include Osmin in Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* and Hagen in Wagner's *Die Götterdämmerung*. There are relatively few true bass parts in Broadway musicals: Emile in *South Pacific* and Joe in *Show Boat* are two examples.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, higher, lighter bass voices came to be called baritones, and are now considered a separate vocal category. As developed by composers such as Rossini and Verdi, baritone parts required more notes above the usual bass range and fewer at the lower end. The crucial features of the baritone voice are its ability to sing a higher tessitura comfortably and its somewhat brighter vocal color. Figaro in Rossini's *Barber of Seville* and Scarpia in Puccini's *Tosca* would be good examples. Many Broadway musical male leading roles are baritone parts, for example: Curly in *Oklahoma*, Billy in *Carousel*, and Don Quixote in *The Man of La Mancha*.

Two other categories are worth mentioning. Bass-baritones combine the resonant lower notes of a bass with the ability to sing a baritone's tessitura. Germans often refer to it as *Hoher Bass* (high bass); this is the vocal classification Wagner requires for the part of Wotan in his Ring cycle. A *basso buffo* (comic bass) specializes in roles such as Bartolo in Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, which require great flexibility and the ability to sing lots of words very quickly.

By the way, Johann Sebastian Bach was a bass.

Contributed by Bill Brown

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)