

A Newsletter of Sons of Orpheus - The Male Choir of Tucson

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## Orpheus Turns Twenty



After the press deadline but before you receive this newsletter, we will have thrown ourselves a big party. Here's how it may have gone:

We met at O'Shaughnessy's Steakhouse March 19th to celebrate the 20th year since our founding by Grayson Hirst. We invited our significant others, our board of directors, and 221 men who are singing or who have sung with Orpheus over the years.

We probably had a great turnout even though

there were some men whose addresses we could not find, and some who now reside in that Zip Code in the sky. We most certainly drank a toast to them, and doubtless we drank to the fellows who came back to help us celebrate.

You may be sure we saw photos and DVDs made during our travels and drank a toast to the photographers and videographers. And you know we sang some songs, one of them written by Mike Fraser just for the occasion. We learned it behind Grayson's back for a surprise. It went like this:

Cont. on p. 2 - Turns 20

# Sons of Orpheus 20th Anniversary Spring Concerts

Sunday, April 3, 2011, 3:00 P.M.

#### **DesertView Performing Arts Center**

39900 S. Clubhouse Drive, SaddleBrooke, AZ - Tickets: \$17, \$20 at the door (Concert may sell out before date of performance.) Ticket Information: 520-818-1000

# Thursday, April 7, 2011, 7:00 P.M. Community Performing Arts Center

1250 W. Continental Rd., Green Valley, AZ - Tickets: \$12 in advance, \$15 at the door Advance tickets also available at Green Valley Chamber of Commerce, 275 W. Continental Rd., Suite 123. For information call: 520-625-5988

#### Sunday, April 10, 2011, 3:00 P.M. Center for the Arts, Proscenium Theatre

Pima Community College -West Campus, 2202 W. Anklam Rd., Tucson - Tickets: \$15, students \$12 For more information, call: Center for the Arts Box Office, 520-206-6986



Turns 20 - Continued from p. 1

#### Víva Hírst!

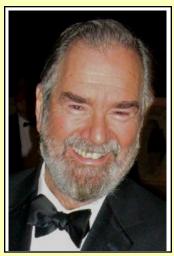


Photo: Iván Berger

(*Brisk March*)
Some talk of Norman Luboff!
And some of Robert Shaw!
And some of old Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians!

(Solo, High Church Plain Chant, steady, deliberate) And some of those very excellent but not quite so famous conductors who, over the years, have led a well-known choir in the tabernacle up in Salt Lake City, Utah.

(Tempo Primo)
But of all the great directors,
The one who ranks the first
in the hearts of the Sons of Orpheus is our founder Grayson Hirst.
Grayson! Grayson! Viva Grayson

Mike, a stalwart baritone and the arranger of several favorites in the repertoire, included the following tribute in the printed version of "Viva Hirst"

"No doubt when Grayson Hirst, a professor in the University of Arizona School of Music, founded Sons of Orpheus in the summer and fall of 1991, much of his abundant energy went into choosing music, lining up rehearsal space, advertising for singers (and stealing a few from other choirs, we hear!), then pounding good tone and diction into his new recruits. Some small corner of his brain may have been looking far into the future, but mostly he concentrated on preparing the choir for its Inaugural Concert on Sunday, May 3, 1992 at Grace St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

"Well, here we are in 2011, part way through our 20th season, and

some things remain the same: Grayson is still our director, and three of the singers in the inaugural concert continue to be active in Orpheus—Jeff Dunn and Mike Negrete in the choir, and Vern Williamsen as the arranger of some of the real jewels in our repertoire.

"During this anniversary season, we are continuing our long-term collaborations with some of our musical friends including the Arizona Balalaika Orchestra, the students of the Arizona School for the Deaf and the Blind, the Tucson Arizona Boys Chorus, and students from the U of A School of Music. And we are also taking time to honor (and roast) Grayson. Rumor has it that some of the roasters will delight in pointing out—delicately of course—a few of our indomitable founder and director's more or less endearing idiosyncrasies. But we will also find ways —"Viva Hirst!" among them—to honor Grayson for the singular achievement of keeping Sons of Orpheus thriving over the years and to express our sincere admiration and affection for him personally."

You can bet the farm we ended the evening with a toast to the future and another to the Orpheus banner. May it fly proudly for at least the next twenty years.

# Ways you can use the remittance envelope

1. Enter the raffle. (Four chances to win!) A \$10 donation will get you a ticket for a \$75 gift certificate from Firebird's Wood Fired Grill at La Encantada; or a \$50 gift certificate for lunch at Vivace in St. Phillip's Plaza; or a \$50 gift certificate from Zivaz Mexican Bistro, 4590 E. Broadway; or a \$50 gift certificate from Jonathan's Cork, fine southwestern dining at 6320 E. Tanque Verde. Raffle tickets will also be sold at the door at all three of our spring concerts. Each \$10 increment earns a ticket. We'll call the winners on Monday, April 11 and mail the prizes. Please

get your donation to us by the end of the first week in April so we have time to put names and phone numbers on the tickets. Good luck.

2. Order CDs. \$10 for the first CD and \$5 for each additional CD. See the CD lineup on page 9. Add \$4 for shipping and handling for each one or two CDs you order. (CD mailers hold two CDs.) Two CDs plus shipping and handling = \$19. Such a deal you'll get!

#### 3. Write a check.

 a. To our scholarship fund to help our two student members, soprano soloists, and instrumentalists, most of them from the University of Arizona School of Music.

b. To our endowment fund, established by the Maurice Magee family and man-

aged by the Community Foundation of Southern Arizona.

- c. To our general fund where we put proceeds from our dues, ticket sales, CD sales, program ad sales, and all the other ways we have of sustaining ourselves, like forking over the loose change we find in sofas. We are a notfor-profit 501 (c) 3 organization. We thank you with a formal acknowledgment for your tax records, and to remind you how important you are to our survival. Please indicate your preference on the memo line.
- **4.** Of course you can use the envelope for origami or for a grocery list, but we hope you'll put a stamp on it and send it back, if only to wish us a break-a-leg and a happy twentieth anniversary.



## SHIVERS and

TIMBRES

One of our baritones asked if anyone could explain why he gets a chill or frisson when the choir sings the word *mundo* in "Personent Hodie," last December's processional at Mission San Xavier. We asked some of our best musicians for an answer and we polled the choir and board members to find out who would be willing to admit to emotional instability caused by music.

Tom Wentzel, a composer and arranger in our bass section, was the first to answer the call. His response was a technical explanation of what might be called the physics of the music that triggers the chemistry in the brain to create the mundo moment. Tom said he gets the shivers every time he or hears the end of "Nessun Dorma" from Puccini's *Turandot*. He added that he remembered being told that some of us got the shivers while we sang his "Letter to Mrs. Bixby," a piece he wrote for the bicentennial celebration of Abraham Lincoln's birth. Tom ended his reply with a list of websites he found by googling "chills in music," noting that the phenomenon may be strongest for an open personality type, and that there are some common elements in music that can trigger an emotional reaction, such as something unexpected or the entrance of a new voice.

Cindy Meier, Tom's wife, wrote to say that she got a chill or tingling through the right side of her body at Mission San Xavier when Vicki P. Love sang the line "Fall on your knees" in the Bach/Gounod "Ave Maria." Here are some other responses:

#### Jim Filipek

I don't get chills when singing or listening to music. For me it's more like a feeling of surprise and then satisfaction when the composer takes me in a different direction from what my "ear" is expecting. For example, when Bach wrote many of his fugues and chorales, his ending points (cadences) should take you to the home key, but many times he uses the ending chord progression to go to another key as he continues. Such surprises are even more prevalent in the music of Verdi and Wagner.

My wife tells me that certain sounds just seem to resonate with her body. Perhaps it's the way each person's brain is wired. I don't know, but she certainly enjoys Verdi and Donizetti for what they do (read tingle) for her.

**Barbara Katz**, a member of the Sons of Orpheus Board of Directors

I get chills whenever I hear Vicki P. Love sing, especially her "Ave Maria" and "Oh Holy Night." I got chills and teary eyed when Grayson sang "The Lord's Prayer" at the memorial for Leta Friesen. And I feel transported to another realm when I listen to or attend a performance of Brahms's "A German Requiem."

#### Van Honeman

Sometimes I get chills when we rehearse in the wintertime with the door to the alley open.

What happens to me is that I tend to get teary at some passages, usually in the higher ranges when I can "let it all hang out" and I can tell we're blowing the audience away.

I recall clearly our crowning moment singing "Nessun Dorma" at the Mahler Hall in Dobbiaco, Italy, after which I was practically bawling my eyes out. Going farther back, I do remember getting chills when we sang in the East Room of the White House in Christmas 1998. I was moved by the whole atmosphere, especially the painting of George Washington that Dolly Madison fled with during the War of 1812.

#### **Larry Ross**

My responses are those of incipient or overt tears rather than chills, perhaps a different result to a similar emotion. I experienced that response to a moment in Tom Wentzel's Lincoln composition: "and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost," and "and the solemn pride that must be yours." The emotional pull of the music so well fit the words. The denouements of Tosca, Butterfly, and Boheme, and the final choruses of the Mozart Reguiem and the Beethoven 9th Symphony are also tear jerkers for me.

#### **Frank Hartline**

Yes, I'm a chiller—more like getting choked up with emotion during a particularly poignant part of a musical piece, or when I see an audience member react strongly to what we are singing. Examples for me are a few places in "Think on Me," a song which reminds me of my Scottish mother, portions of "Mansions of the Lord" which recall some Vietnam War comrades lost, and a few passages of our most beautiful pieces when some in the audience have visible reactions. These moments are not good for a performing singer, so I have tried pinching myself and other distractors that singing books recommend.

#### **Richard Miller**

I don't get chills; instead, I choke up. It happens every year, often during a hymn when we're singing with the Boys Chorus. It's the combination of taking in the full visual experience and the enveloping sound. I can also get weepy during Fauré's "Cantique de Jean Racine." This happened first when I put on the Orpheus CD in order to practice the piece at home. The first few strains with the violin—and voilà, I got all choked up.

Cont. on p. 8 - SHIVERS



#### RIP Leta Friesen

January 15th at the Green Valley Community Church, Orpheus participated in a memorial service for the wife of first tenor Eugene Friesen.

Nobody heard Orpheus sing as many times as Leta did. Not only did she travel with us on our European tours and attend nearly all our local concerts, she was present at our Wednesday evening rehearsals during the last several years of her life when she suffered from dementia. She did not like to be alone at night so she made the trip from Green Valley with Eugene and sat on a couch in the lobby of the rehearsal hall, working on word puzzles and listening to us sing. On the way home she'd let Eugene know how we did.

The men knew of Leta's problem. We always received a smile and a cheerful hello when we greeted her and when we said goodbye. It was hard to say goodbye to her for the last time.

# A Christmas Remembrance

-Jerry Villano

On December 18th the choir was honored to perform at East Lawn Palms Mortuary and Cemetery on E. Grant Road for an annual Christmas ceremony in remembrance of loved ones interred there.

The Reverend Mark S. Bickerton (Pastor of Arcadia Light and Life Church on N. Arcadia Avenue) welcomed the gathering and introduced Grayson Hirst and the choir. We sang a mixture of sacred and secular music for about four hundred people.

Invitations to the event included an opportunity for families to submit a photograph of deceased loved ones. East Lawn encased the photos in clear Christmas ornaments to be placed on a lighted Christmas tree by family members as their loved one's name, and dates of birth and passing, were announced.

As we were singing, I saw in the faces of the audience sorrow and joy, emptiness and hope, loss and peace. And I saw appreciation for a beautiful Christmas remembrance of lost loved ones.

I sincerely thank fellow choir members who were there to make a meaningful evening for all who were grieving.

[Editor's note: Jerry was instrumental in securing East Lawn's invitation to us to perform at this event. His beloved wife, Betty, passed away on April 30th, 2009 after a courageous battle with Parkinsonism.]

# A Long and Winding Road to Orpheus

#### By Jim Kitchak



Photo: Iván Berge

My earliest memory of choral singing was having my hair pulled by a large woman named Mrs. Rundquist. She was the traveling grade school vocal teacher in my small hometown, Ashland, in northern Wisconsin. It seemed she thought pain could raise my voice to the soprano she needed for her choir.

After I escaped from Mrs. Rundquist, I moved on to playing ukulele and singing with my best friend, Greg. We entertained at PTA meetings and when our classroom teacher needed a break. Later I went on to piano lessons and then horns: trumpet, valve trombone, and baritone. I continued playing in high school band, marching band, even the orchestra with a rag stuffed into my baritone to simulate a bassoon. I participated in music contests throughout most of my college days until time constraints forced me to concentrate on my majors, German and English. End of music career.

A lifetime later I kept the promise to my wife that I would attend church while the children were growing up. Fortunately a small church choir accepted my limited vocal talents, and I even ended up sharing the directorship of the group. But at last I became bored with the howling soprano, the flat alto, and the politics. My musical life took another turn.

I started a small men's chorus in Racine, Wisconsin. The group was fun to direct, but eventually we found a real volunteer director and accompanist, and I moved from section to section, where ever I was needed. Bass, baritone, second tenor, a man of many voices. My time with Mrs. Rundquist had paid off after all. The group still exists and I am happy to rejoin them when we head back to Racine in the summer.

My connection with Orpheus began with Google when I looked for choirs as a pastime to go with my stained-glass and house-flipping hobbies. I began corresponding with Grayson Hirst, who scared me properly when he told me I would have to audition. He seated me next to Ned Mackey during the first rehearsal. When it was over, I asked Ned when my audition was to be. He told me I had just had it and welcomed me to the baritone section.

Orpheus has been the highlight of my three winters here in Arizona, and I often get withdrawal symptoms when we have a week or two off between our winter and spring seasons. I hope to continue with the group as long as I am able to squeak out a note and stay upright on the risers.



# Sons of Orpheus

#### The Male Choir of Tucson

#### **Spring Concert Program**

O Welche Lust! (Prisoner's Chorus), from Fidelio, Act 1, Ludwig von Beethoven. Brandon Dale, tenor Jess Koehn, bass baritone; Brent Burmeister and Russ Ronnebaum, pianists.

Va pensiero sull'ali dorate (Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves), from Nabuco, Act III, Scene 2, Giuseppe Verdi.

#### п

Gavotte: Obéissons quand leur voix appelle from Manon, Act III, Scene 1, Jules Massenet. Bathania Baray, soprano, Jess Koehn, bass baritone.

Ave Maria (Méditation), from Thaïs, Jules Massenet, arr. Thomas Wentzel. Nicole Skaggs, violin.

#### Ш

Malagueña, from Suite Andalucia, Ernesto Lecuona, arr. Jim Filipek.

Granada (Fantasía Española), Agustín Lara.

#### Intermission

#### IV

Fput', Vassily Soloviev-Sedoy, arr. E. Sheynkman.

Darogai D'Linnoyu (The Long Road), Boris Fomin, arr. Vern Williamsen. Jess Koehn, bass baritone.

Gyimn Vyelyikamu Goradu (Hymn to a Great City), from The Bronze Horseman, Reinhold Glière, arr. Michael Fraser.

Kalinka, Ivan Petrovich Larionov.

Siberia, from Silk Stockings, Cole Porter. Jeffrey Dunn, tenor; Mike Negrete, tenor; Iván Berger, bass.

#### ٧

Sing Me to Heaven, Daniel E. Gawthrop.

Vocalise, Wilbur Chenoweth. Bathania Baray, soprano.

The Road Not Taken, from Frostiana, Randall Thompson.

The Awakening, Joseph M. Martin.

#### VI

Saddle Up, Jim Hogan.

Cowboys Ain't Supposed to Cry, Moe Bandy. Moonstruck Coyotes.

#### VII

Back in the Saddle Again, Ray Whitely, Gene Autry, arr. Vern. Williamsen.

Don't Fence Me In, Bob Fletcher, Cole Porter, arr. Maurice Hill. Iván Berger, bass.

Jingle, Jangle, Jingle from The Forest Rangers (Paramount, 1942), Frank Loesser & Jospeh J. Lilley, arr. M. Hill, V. Williamsen.

Mule Train from Singing Guns (Republic, 1950), Fred Glickman, Hy Heath, & Johnny Lang, arr. Maurice Hill. Jim Hogan, tenor.

#### Grayson Hirst, founder/director; Brent Burmeister, pianist



# Sons of Orpheus - The Male Choir of Tucson

We gratefully acknowledge the following donations received during 2010.

Director's Circle (\$2,500 and above)

Sonja Rath

Benefactor (\$1,000 - \$2,499)

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Michael and Eleanor Fraser Charles M. Pettis
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Jerry Villano

Linda Griffin Thomas McGorray James Wimer
Theron Hallock Carl and JoAnn Metzger Woon-Yin Wong

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Cameron and Jackie Fordyce



# GHOSTS of Christmas 19ast

Mission San Xavier del Bac, December 6th, 7th, and 8th, six and eight o'clock.

There are no Scrooges in our choir. We're too busy for a "Bah! Humbug!" Beginning in October, Christmas music consumes most of our attention. At the full rehearsal before the Mission San Xavier concerts, we need to know our stuff. (Our director implores us to "print it and frame it" when we have accomplished a piece to his satisfaction.)

Although the rehearsal at San Xavier lacks the candlelit ambiance of the concerts, it is one of the most interesting events on our calendar. We climb onto the risers wearing our most comfortable shoes, for we know because of the stops and starts we won't climb down until the last note dies away some two hours later. The organist, the soloists, and the brass quartet are likewise dressed for comfort. When the Tucson Arizona Boys Chorus streams in wearing red sweatshirts, they provide the only visible homage to Christmas except for some trimmings on the walls.

The audience is composed of the parents of the boys, several Orpheus wives and friends, and some pleasantly surprised wanderers who just happen to be there for a visit to the beautiful old mission. A place front and center is reserved for members of the Patronato San Xavier, funders of the maintenance and restoration of the venerable buildings.

Darkness limits our view of the audience during the concerts, but at the rehearsal it's light enough for us to enjoy a visual connection to the people we are singing for. The solemnity of the concerts is moving for musicians and listeners alike, but the casual atmosphere of

the rehearsal encourages applause, even cheers. What singer doesn't like that!

#### Tucson Estates, Sunday, December 12th

It's always a great pleasure to sing for these folks! Because they sit close to the stage, we can establish a pleasant rapport with them. After Vicky P. Love, our soprano soloist, sang the Bach/Gounod "Ave Maria," the audience sprang to their feet as though they had been yanked upright by a puppeteer! Vicky's professors at the University of Arizona School of Music are deservedly proud to say they have had something to do with her accomplishments, but we suspect that voice was special from her first cry.

#### ASDB, December 15th, A Record Setter

Liz Westrick, Stewardship Manager for the Tucson Community Food Bank, reported that Orpheus raised \$7,313 (a new high), and 406 pounds of food in connection with our thirteenth annual Food Bank Christmas concert at the Arizona School for the Deaf and the Blind. We work hard to collect money for this event, so we're pleased with the success.

The show was a success too. The ASDB kids performed skillfully and enthusiastically, and Mariachi Tapatío brought down the house. Their leader, Alberto Ranjel, Jr., has a voice and a style that is "American Idol" quality.

We finished our part of the program, as we have for the past several years, singing and signing "White Christmas," led by sign-language interpreter, Joe Camarillo. We have the signs pretty well memorized by now, but we are not ready to try it without Joe.

#### Green Valley, December 17th

We sang a reprise of our Tucson Estates concert for a nice crowd in the beautiful Valley Presbyterian Church. It is our policy to donate \$5 to the Community Food Bank for each ticket we sell to the Green Valley folks. With their help we brought our total Food Bank donation for 2010 to nearly \$8,000.

We had sung ten concerts by the time we struck the set in Green Valley. Only then did have time to hang our stockings on the mantle and settle down for a long winter's nap, one with no spectral visitations.





Nicole Skaggs started studying violin in Japan at the age of three. When she was four she moved to Tucson and began studying with Virginia Sorenson. Since the age of five she has been studying with Wynne Rife.

Nicole is twelve years old and is in the seventh grade at Sonoran Science Academy. Outside of the violin, her favorite subjects are Art, Science, and English. Nicole has participated in the Tucson Junior Strings for several years.

## Warming up

This wine stem maestro needs to tune before he starts to play, He insists on authenticity and likes a cabernet.

"Is that A a little flat?" the virtuoso wonders. He takes a sip to raise the pitch, thus causing further blunders.

He swigs the B to get it right and rubs the rim a swirl. He finds he's got that note too high; he must give the C a whirl.

Now that one's sharp, so he gulps the D and listens to it ring. Oh, damn it all, now that one's wrong, so he gives E a fling.

On he goes through F and G as his brain begins to fry. He orders up anotherjug, for the last stem's gone bone dry.

"Rondo 13" Gertrude Degenhardt -Ned Mackey

#### SHIVERS - Continued from p. 5

Richard's wife, Linda, also a singer, added, "My personal goose bumps start when the choir processes into Mission San Xavier, and they don't subside until the end of the performance. The whole experience that takes place in candle-light and in that acoustic really does affect me emotionally.

#### Cam Fordyce

A vivid memory for me is the concert in the Alta Pusteria

when Orpheus sang "Nessun Dorma." By the time we finished, every singer I could see was teary. Even Grayson was wiping his eyes. The experience was amplified by the incredibly enthusiastic reaction of the Italian audience.

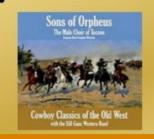
[Editor's note: Grayson Hirst, our director, is the biggest crybaby of us all! I can't watch him during emotional moments in the music. His reaction, whether an expression of grief or joy, is contagious. My singing is done. I must lip sync until I can regain control.]

Sons of Orpheus is always looking for a few good men. If you would enjoy singing the rich literature written for male voices, if you would love to travel every few years to fascinating places, and if you would appreciate the camaraderie and lasting friendships that form in this choir, then give Grayson a call at 520-621-1649 and come raise your voice with us!



# Our line-up of CDs







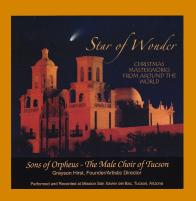
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sonsoforpheus.org



# Mne nikogda v zshizni nebylo tak kharasho\*





Photo: Jim Palka

We sang five pieces with our longtime friends, the Arizona Balalaika Orchestra, at their concerts on January 29th and 30th. The audiences at Pima College's Proscenium Theater were large and enthusiastic, especially for the special guests, the Ukrainian virtuosi Tamara Volskaya and Anatoliy Trofimov.

One of the nicest moments of the weekend for Orpheus happened at the Saturday morning rehearsal. Tamara and Anatoliy came in a little late because of weather problems in New York. Tamara was organizing her music when we began to sing. Suddenly she turned toward us and watched with a big smile on her face, a smile that said, "Hey, these guys can sing! And I can tell they're singing in Russian!"

The Arizona Balalaika Orchestra will appear for a set at our spring concerts. (See schedule on page 5 for details.)

\*We wanted to give this article a little taste of Russia, so we went to the Internet and chose a sentence transliterated from the Cyrillic to the Roman alphabet and rendered in English. It's badly fractured, but it expresses our pleasure at singing with this wonderful orchestra:

"Never in my life I felt myself so good."

Sons of Orpheus is supported in part by grants from the Tucson Pima Arts Council and the Arizona Commission on the Arts

with funding from the State of Arizona and the National Endowment for the Arts.



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on the Arts

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Eugene Friesen
John Kamper
Tom McGorray
Bruce Mortensen
James Naughton
Jim Tomlinson
Jerry Villano
Dick Wroldsen

#### Seconds Tenors: Dave Burns

Jim Hogan Van Honeman Bob Kurtz Richard Miller Mike Negrete Doug Nordell Chris Richied Larry Ross Larry Sayre

#### Baritones:

Mike Bradley Chuck Dickson Pete DiCurti John Evans Jim Filipek Cameron Fordyce Michael Fraser Frank Hartline Jim Kitchak Ned Mackey Rick Sack Raymond Tess

#### Basses:

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