

Handel's Saul

Ad Astra Chamber Choir

Festival Orchestra

Alex Underwood, conductor

Trinity United Methodist Church

Saturday, August 1st, 7:30pm

PROGRAM

Saul, HWV 53

George Frideric Handel

Act One

Chorus

How excellent Thy name, O Lord,
In all the world is known!
Above all Heav'ns, O King ador'd,
How hast Thou set Thy glorious throne!

Aria

Soprano

An infant rais'd by Thy command,
To quell Thy rebel foes,
Could fierce Goliath's dreadful hand
Superior in the fight oppose.

Trio

Along the monster atheist strode,
With more than human pride,
And armies of the living God
Exulting in his strength defied.

Chorus

The youth inspir'd by Thee, O Lord,
With ease the boaster slew:
Our fainting courage soon restor'd,
And headlong drove that impious crew.

Recitative

Michal

He comes, he comes!

Aria*Michal*

O godlike youth, by all confess'd
Of human race the pride!
O virgin among women blest,
Whom Heav'n ordains thy bride!
But ah, how strong a bar I see
Betwixt my happiness and me!
O godlike youth. . . *da capo*

Recitative*Abner*

Behold, O king, the brave, victorious youth,
And in his hand the haughty giant's head.

Saul

Young man, whose son art thou?

David

The son of Jesse,
Thy faithful servant, and a Bethlehemite.

Saul

Return no more to Jesse; stay with me;
And as an earnest of my future favour,
Thou shalt espouse my daughter: small reward
Of such desert, since to thy arm alone
We owe our safety, peace and liberty.

Aria*David*

O king, your favours with delight
I take, but must refuse your praise:
For every pious Israelite
To God that tribute pays.
Through Him we put to flight our foes,
And in His name,
We trod them under that against us rose.

Recitative*Jonathan*

Oh, early piety! Oh, modest merit!
In this embrace my heart bestows itself;
Henceforth, thou noble youth, accept my frienship,
And Jonathan and David are but one.

Aria*Merab*

What abject thoughts a prince can have!
In rank a prince, in mind a slave.

Recitative*Merab*

Yet think on whom this honour you bestow;
How poor in fortune, and in birth how low!

Aria*Jonathan*

Birth and fortune I despise!
From virtue let my friendship rise.

Recitative*Saul*

'Thou, Merab, first in birth, be first in honour:
'Thine be the valiant youth, whose arm has sav'd
'Thy country from her foes.

Merab

Oh, mean alliance!

Aria*Merab*

My soul rejects the thought with scorn,
That such a boy, till now unknown,
Of poor plebeian parents born,
Should mix with royal blood his own!
Though Saul's command I can't decline,
I must prevent his low design,
And save the honour of his line.

Aria*Michal*

See, with what a scornful air
She the precious gift receives!
Though e'er so noble, or so fair,
She cannot merit what he gives.

Chorus

Welcome, welcome, mighty king!
Welcome all who conquest bring!
Welcome David, warlike boy,
Author of our present joy!
Saul, who hast thy thousands slain,
Welcome to thy friends again!
David his ten thousands slew,
Ten thousand praises are his due!

Accompagnato*Saul*

What do I hear? Am I then sunk so low,
To have this upstart boy preferr'd before me?

Chorus

David his ten thousands slew,
Ten thousand praises are his due!

Accompagnato*Saul*

To him ten thousands, and to me but thousands!
What can they give him more, except the kingdom?

Aria*Saul*

With rage I shall burst his praises to hear!
Oh, how I both hate the stripling, and fear!
What mortal a rival in glory can bear?

Recitative*Abner*

Racked with infernal pains, ev'n now the king
Comes forth, and mutters horrid words, which hell,
No human tongue, has taught him.

Aria*David*

O Lord, whose mercies numberless
O'er all thy works prevail:
Though daily man Thy law transgress,
Thy patience cannot fail.
If yet his sin be not too great,
The busy fiend control;
Yet longer for repentance wait,
And heal his wounded soul.

Recitative*Jonathan*

'Tis all in vain; his fury still continues:
With wild distraction on my friend he stares,
Stamps on the ground, and seems intent on mischief.

Aria*Saul*

A serpent, in my bosom warm'd,
Would sting me to the heart:
But of his venom soon disarm'd,
Himself shall feel the smart.
Ambitious boy! Now learn what danger
It is to rouse a monarch's anger!

Recitative*Saul*

Has he escap'd my rage?
I charge thee, Jonathan, upon thy duty,
And all, on your allegiance, to destroy
This bold, aspiring youth; for while he lives,
I am not safe. Reply not, but obey.

Aria*Merab*

Capricious man, in humour lost,
By ev'ry wind of passion toss'd!
Now sets his vassal on the throne,
Then low as earth he casts him down!
His temper knows no middle state,
Extreme alike in love or hate.

Accompagnato*Jonathan*

O filial piety! O sacred friendship!
How shall I reconcile you? Cruel father!
Your just commands I always have obeyed:
But to destroy my friend, the brave, the virtuous,
The godlike David, Israel's defender,
And terror of her foes! To disobey you —
What shall I call it? 'Tis an act of duty
To God, to David — nay, indeed, to you.

Aria*Jonathan*

No, cruel father, no!
Your hard commands I can't obey.
Shall I with sacrilegious blow
Take pious David's life away?
No, cruel father, no!
No, with my life I must defend
Against the world my best, my dearest friend.

Chorus

Preserve him for the glory of Thy name,
Thy people's safety, and the heathen's shame.

ACT TWO

Chorus

Envy, eldest born of hell,
Cease in human breasts to dwell,
Ever at all good repining,
Still the happy undermining!
God and man by thee infested,
Thou by God and man detested,
Most thyself thou dost torment,
At once the crime and punishment!
Hide thee in the blackest night:
Virtue sickens at thy sight!

Recitative

Jonathan

Ah, dearest friend, undone by too much virtue!
Think you, an evil spirit was the cause
Of all my father's rage? It was, indeed,
A spirit of envy, and of mortal hate.
He has resolv'd your death; and sternly charg'd
His whole retinue, me especially,
To execute his vengeance.

David

Oh, strange vicissitude! But yesterday
He thought me worthy of his daughter's love;
Today he seeks my life.

Jonathan

My sister Merab, by his own gift thy right,
He hath bestow'd on Adriel.

David

Oh, my prince, would that were all!
It would not grieve me much: the scornful maid
(Didst thou observe?) with such disdainful pride
Receiv'd the king's command! But lovely Michal,
As mild as she is fair, outstrips all praise.

Aria*David*

Such haughty beauties rather move
Aversion, than engage our love.
They can only our cares beguile,
Who gently speak, and sweetly smile.
If virtue in that dress appear,
Who, that sees, can love forbear?
Such beauties. . . *da capo*.

Recitative*Jonathan*

My father comes: retire, my friend, while I
With peaceful accents try to calm his rage.

Recitative*Saul*

Hast thou obey'd my orders, and destroy'd
My mortal enemy, the son of Jesse?

Jonathan

Alas, my father! He your enemy?
Say, rather, he has done important service
To you, and to the nation; hazarded
His life for both, and slain our giant foe,
Whose presence made the boldest of us tremble.

Aria*Jonathan*

Sin not, O king, against the youth,
Who ne'er offended you:
Think, to his loyalty and truth,
What great rewards are due!

Aria*Saul*

As great Jehovah lives, I swear,
The youth shall not be slain:
Bid him return, and void of fear
Adorn our court again.

Aria*Jonathan*

From cities stormed, and battles won,
What glory can accrue?
By this the hero best is known,
He can himself subdue.
Wisest and greatest of his kind,
Who can in reason's fetters bind
The madness of his angry mind!

Recitative*Jonathan*

Appear, my friend.

Saul

No more imagine danger:
Be first in our esteem; with wonted valour
Repel the insults of the Philistines:
And as a proof of my sincerity,
(Oh, hardness to dissemble!) instantly
Espouse my daughter Michal.

Recitative*Saul*

Yes, he shall wed my daughter! But how long
Shall he enjoy her? He shall lead my armies!
But have the Philistines no darts, no swords,
To pierce the heart of David? Yes, this once
To them I leave him; they shall do me right!

Recitative*Michal*

A father's will has authorized my love:
No longer, Michal, then attempt to hide
The secret of my soul. I love thee, David,
And long have loved. Thy virtue was the cause;
And that be my defence.

Recitative*David*

Thy father is as cruel, and as false,
As thou art kind and true. When I approach'd him,
New from the slaughter of his enemies,
His eyes with fury flam'd, his arms he rais'd,
With rage grown stronger; by my guiltless head
The javelin whizzing flew, and in the wall
Mock'd once again his impotence of malice.

Duet*David*

At persecution I can laugh;
No fear my soul can move,
In God's protection safe,
And blest in Michal's love.

Michal

Ah, dearest youth, for thee I fear!
Fly, begone, for death is near!

David

Fear not, lovely fair, for me:
Death, where thou art, cannot be;
Smile, and danger is no more.

Michal

Fly, or death is at the door!
See, the murd'rous band comes on!
Stay no longer, fly, begone!

Recitative*Michal*

Whom dost thou seek? And who hast sent thee hither?

Doeg

I seek for David, and am sent by Saul.

Michal

Thy errand?

Doeg

'Tis a summons to the Court.

Michal

Say he is sick.

Doeg

In sickness or in health,

Alive or dead, he must be brought to Saul;

Show me his chamber.

Do you mock the king?

This disappointment will enrage him more:

Then tremble for th'event.

Aria*Michal*

No, no, let the guilty tremble

At ev'ry thought of danger near.

Though numbers, armed with death, assemble,

My innocence disdains to fear.

Though great their power as their spite,

Undaunted still, my soul, remain:

For greater is Jehovah's might,

And will their lawless force restrain.

Recitative*Merab*

Mean as he was, he is my brother now,

My sister's husband; and to speak the truth,

Has qualities which justice bids me love,

And pity his distress. My father's cruelty

Strikes me with horror! At th'approaching feast

I fear some dire event, unless my brother,

His friend, the faithful Jonathan, avert

Th'impending ruin. I know he'll do his best.

Aria*Merab*

Author of peace, who canst control
Every passion of the soul;
To whose good spirit alone we owe
Words that sweet as honey flow:
With thy dear influence his tongue be fill'd,
And cruel wrath to soft persuasion yield.

Accompagnato*Saul*

The time at length is come when I shall take
My full revenge on Jesses's son.
No longer shall the stripling make
His sov'reign totter on the throne.
He dies — this blaster of my fame,
Bane of my peace, and author of my shame!

Recitative*Saul*

Where is the son of Jesse? Comes he not
To grace our feast?

Jonathan

He earnestly ask'd leave
To go to Bethlem, where his father's house,
At solemn rites of annual sacrifice,
Requir'd his presence.

Saul

O perverse, rebellious!
Thinkst thou I do not know that thou hast chose
The son of Jesse to thy own confusion?
The world will say thou art no son of mine,
Who thus canst love the man I hate; the man
Who, if he lives, will rob thee of thy crown:
Send, fetch him thither; for the wretch must die.

Jonathan

What has he done? And wherefore must he die?

Saul

Darest thou oppose my will? Die then thyself!

Chorus

Oh, fatal consequence
Of rage, by reason uncontroll'd!
With every law he can dispense;
No ties the furious monster hold:
From crime to crime he blindly goes,
Nor end, but with his own destruction knows.

ACT THREE**Accompagnato***Saul*

Wretch that I am, of my own ruin author!
Where are my old supports? The valiant youth,
Whose very name was terror to my foes,
My rage has drove away. Of God forsaken,
In vain I ask his counsel. He vouchsafes
No answer to the sons of disobedience!
Even my own courage fails me! Can it be?
Is Saul become a coward? I'll not believe it!
If Heav'n denies thee aid, seek it from hell!

Accompagnato*Saul*

'Tis said, here lives a woman, close familiar
With th'enemy of mankind: her I'll consult,
And know the worst. Her art is death by law;
And while I minded law, sure death attended
Such horrid practises. Yet, oh hard fate,
Myself am now reduc'd to ask the counsel
Of those I once abhorr'd!

Recitative

Witch of Endor

With me what would'st thou?

Saul

I would, that by thy art thou bring me up
The man whom I shall name.

Witch

Alas! Thou know'st
How Saul has cut off those who use this art.
Would'st thou ensnare me?

Saul

As Jehovah lives,
On this account no mischief shall befall thee.

Witch

Whom shall I bring up to thee?

Saul

Bring up Samuel.

Aria

Witch

Infernal spirits, by whose pow'r
Departed ghosts in living forms appear,
Add horror to the midnight hour,
And chill the boldest hearts with fear:
To this stranger's wond'ring eyes
Let the prophet Samuel rise!

Accompagnato

Apparition of Samuel

Why hast thou forc'd me from the realms of peace
Back to this world of woe?

Saul

O holy prophet!
Refuse me not thy aid in this distress.
The num'rous foe stands ready for the battle:
God has forsaken me: no more he answers
By prophets or by dreams: no hope remains,
Unless I learn from thee from course to take.

Samuel

Hath God forsaken thee? And dost thou ask
My counsel? Did I not foretell thy fate,
When, madly disobedient, thou didst spare
The curst Amalekite, and on the spoil
Didst fly rapacious? Therefore God this day
Hath verified my words in thy destruction,
Hath rent the kingdom from thee, and bestow'd it
On David, whom thou hatest for his virtue.
Thou and thy sons shall be with me tomorrow,
And Israel by Philistine arms shall fall.
The Lord hath said it: He will make it good.

Symphony

Recitative

David

Whence comest thou?

Amalekite

Out of the camp of Israel.

David

Thou canst inform me then. How went the battle?

Amalekite

The people, put to flight, in numbers fell,
And Saul, and Jonathan his son, are dead.

David

Alas, my brother! But how knowest thou
That they are dead?

Amalekite

Upon mount Gilboa
I met with Saul, just fall'n upon his spear;
Swiftly the foe pursu'd; he cried to me,
Begg'd me to finish his imperfect work,
And end a life of pain and ignominy.
I knew he could not live, therefore slew him;
Took from his head the crown, and from his arms
The bracelets, and have brought them to my lord.

David

Whence art thou?

Amalekite

Of the race of Amalek.

Aria

David

Impious wretch, of race accurst!
And of all that race the worst!
How hast thou dar'd to lift thy sword
Again th'anointed of the Lord?
Fall on him, smite him, let him die!
On thy own head thy blood will lie;
Since thy own mouth has testified,
By thee the Lord's anointed died.

Symphony: Funeral March

Chorus

Mourn, Israel, mourn thy beauty lost,
Thy choicest youth on Gilboa slain!
How have thy fairest hopes been cross'd!
What heaps of mighty warriors strew the plain!

Aria

Soprano

In sweetest harmony they lived,
Nor death their union could divide.
The pious son ne'er left the father's side,
But him defending bravely died:
A loss too great to be survived!
For Saul, ye maids of Israel, moan,
To whose indulgent care
You owe the scarlet and the gold you wear,
And all the pomp in which your beauty long has shone.

Solo and Chorus

O fatal day! How low the mighty lie!
O Jonathan! How nobly didst thou die,
For thy king and people slain.

David

For thee, my brother Jonathan,
How great is my distress!
What language can my grief express?
Great was the pleasure I enjoy'd in thee,
And more than woman's love thy wondrous love to me!

David and Israelites

O fatal day! How low the mighty lie!
Where, Israel, is thy glory fled?
Spoil'd of thy arms, and sunk in infamy,
How canst thou raise again thy drooping head!

George Frideric Handel

Born February 23, 1685 in Halle, Germany

Died April 14, 1759 in London, United Kingdom

If we consider Johann Sebastian Bach a godfather of Western music, George Frideric Handel is certainly one of its first “rock stars.” A compositional dynamo, he mastered nearly all of the major genres of music in vogue in the early eighteenth century. Unlike Bach, Handel was a mobile composer and performer who found success across Europe. To boot, he was a shrewd businessman, always acclimating to current tastes and (usually) always turning a profit.

The son of a barber-surgeon, Handel first established a name for himself in Italy before making London his base of operations in 1712. (He had taken the city by storm with his opera *Rinaldo* in 1710.) Around 1732, however, changing tastes in the opera world compelled Handel to switch his gears towards oratorio, a genre he had encountered earlier in his youth. Dramatic works without any staging, sets or costumes, oratorios were effectively cheaper alternatives to opera, still presenting story and character at the expense of production values. (Paradoxically, many of Handel’s oratorios are now presented in fully staged productions in opera houses around the world.) An oratorio’s subject matter usually came from sacred or religious sources, as is the case with *Saul* and that original Christmas blockbuster *Messiah*, also written by Handel.

Saul was composed between July and September 1738. Plans for a new opera season that year had been foiled by a lack of subscribers, and rather than sit idle, Handel pooled his available resources to produce a new oratorio. The story of *Saul* in the Old Testament’s Book of Samuel formed the basis of Charles Jennen’s libretto, with some material borrowed from the 1656 epic *Davidis*. Bookending the entire oratorio is war and its fortunes, themes resonant with England’s recent centuries of religious strife. When the first act begins, David has just defeated the giant Goliath with his slingshot and the third act ends with another victory for David, albeit a bittersweet one: the wicked Saul and his sons have ignobly perished at the Battle of Mount Gilboa.

The strife between fathers and sons occupies the rest of the narrative. At the center is Saul, a robust but insecure king whose envy of David, his popular adopted son, ultimately ends in his own destruction. (Here Handel uses vocal range to good effect, the role of Saul demanding a dark, deep bass and that of David calling for a bright alto or countertenor.) Like one of Shakespeare’s tragic kings, Saul’s madness topples over into pure mania. He spurs his own son Jonathan, David’s boon companion, and like Macbeth, he turns to treachery and witchcraft in his quest to keep his crown. His rendezvous with the mysterious

Witch of Endor (a terrific drag role for tenor) only confirms his fears of David's eventual rise to glory and his ignominious death at the hands of an Amalekite.

One of the most important components of an oratorio, especially Handel's, is the chorus. They are a core dramatic and musical entity, functioning as either characters ("collective groups" like warring armies or nations) or commentators on the action. In *Saul*, for example, they initially appear as a chorus of Israelites and their praise of the young hero David is what triggers the deadly jealousy of King Saul. The opening chorus of Act Two, "Envy! Eldest born of Hell!" beautifully muses and dissects the major emotion at play in the story.

Separate from the chorus are the principal characters whose actions form the central story: King Saul, his children and David. The major musical units for these characters are recitative-like passages where the text is sung like spoken dialogue—and the aria (or air), a sung solo movement in which the characters give full vent to their emotional state. Arias are usually preceded by recitatives, which give important information and context. Arias themselves frequently contain three parts, a form known as *da capo*. First comes an initial section, A, followed by a contrasting section, B. Section A is then repeated, but not exactly as before. Ferocious vocal fireworks are thrown into this repeat to display the individual talents of the performers. Scene Two presents such a set up: Michal, Saul's daughter, announces the approach of David in her recitative "He comes." Her aria "O godlike youth" follows: first, she praises David's desirability, then in a contrasting section admits her chances for him are slim. This is followed by a modified reprise of the first section.

The first performance of *Saul* was held at King's Theatre in London on 16 January 1739. The work, noted at the time for its instrumental extravagances (kettle drums for the battle symphonies and elaborate passages for organ and carillon), was to all accounts well received. Well-represented on modern recordings, the musical and dramatic story-telling in *Saul* continues to fascinate audiences almost three hundred years after its premiere with its exploration of the personal, the political, the spiritual, and ultimately, the tragic intersection of all three.

—Ryan M. Prendergast

CAST

Saul.....Brian Mextorf
David.....Janie Brokenicky
Jonathan.....Francis Williams
Michal.....Megan Pachecano
Merab.....Aani Bourassa
Witch.....Michael Davidson

AD ASTRA CHAMBER CHOIR

John Irving, chorus master

Soprano

Ellen Bialek*+
Shelby Matlock*+
Alexandra Rome
Rachel Sipe

Alto

Melody Barton
Katie Bruton
Alyssa Dawson
John Irving

Tenor

Michael Davidson
Christopher Hilger
Nathan Hilger*+

Bass

Jim Balthazor
Ethan Kaufman
Riley King*+
Johnny Matlock

*Young Artist
+Soloist

FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

Alex Underwood, conductor

Violin I

Denise Blehm
Jennifer Sauer
Namoi Kitzis

Violin II

Manda Deegan
Nathan Mark
Doug Drabkin

Viola

Joan Crull
Kyra Gilpin

Cello

Ben Cline

Double Bass

Andrew Book

Organ

Leann Hillmer

Harpsichord

Max Holman

Flute

Mel Sauer
Hilary Shepard

Oboe

Taryn Rupp
Shelby Westfahl

Bassoon

Keighley Miller
Sarah Stevens

Trumpet

Brad Dawson
Corey Huggins

Trombone

Katie Glading
Cole Harrison
Lane Weaver

Percussion

Kevin Pham



Soprano **Megan Pachecano** most recently performed the roles of Anne Page in Vaughn Williams' *Sir John in Love* with Boston's Odyssey Opera, Adina in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* with New Rochelle Opera, Norina in Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* with Salt Marsh Opera, Gianetta in *L'elisir d'amore* with Opera MODO, Zerlina in scenes from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* with the Somerset Valley Orchestra, Crobyle in Massenet's *Thaïs* with The Opera Company of Middlebury, covered Serafina in Donizetti's *Il campanello di notte* with Garden State Opera, and performed as a Studio Artist with Opera New Jersey, where she covered Pitti Sing in *The Mikado*, and later toured in their outreach production of *Hansel and Gretel*. Ms. Pachecano holds a Master of Music in Classical Voice from Manhattan School of Music where she sang the roles of Susanna in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* and Annabel Lee in Shultz' *Gargoyles*. She received her Bachelor of Music in Voice

Performance from The University of Texas at Austin. A frequent soloist of concert repertoire, Ms. Pachecano has sung Handel's *Messiah* with the Helena Symphony, Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass*, Little Organ Mass, Beethoven's *Die Ruinen von Athen*, and Mozart's *Great Mass in C minor* with the Astoria Symphony Orchestra, Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5* and Mozart's *Exsultate, jubilate* with the Round Rock Symphony Orchestra, Mozart's *Requiem* with the Russell Arts Council's Summer Concert Series, and Handel's *Israel in Egypt* with the Westminster Choral Festival. Other appearances include concerts with Opera Theater of Connecticut at the Sanibel Music Festival and with the Caramoor International Music Festival. In the recording studio, Ms. Pachecano was a soloist in Corigliano's *A Dylan Thomas Trilogy, Part I: Fern Hill* on the Naxos recording *American Choral Music*, and created the role of Elizabeth on the cast recording of Stephen Melillo's *Son of the Storm*.



Baritone **Brian Mextorf** is quickly gaining recognition as a dynamic performer and a sensitive musician. Brian was recently named a winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, North Carolina District and the 2nd place winner of the Southeast Region, as well as a winner of the competitive 2014 Schuyler Career Bridges Grant. Most recently heard as Aeneas in Opera Saratoga's new production of *Dido and Aeneas*, Brian also spent the 2014-15 season as an Emerging Artist with Virginia Opera. In this capacity, Brian has sung performances of Bill Bobstay and Captain Corcoran in *HMS Pinafore*, as well as Anthony (cover) in *Sweeney Todd* and a three month educational tour. Brian will return to VOA in 2015-16 to sing performances of John Styx (Jupiter cover) in *Orpheus in the Underworld*, Paris (Capulet cover) in *Roméo et Juliette*, and Doganiere (Marcello cover) in *La bohème*. On the concert stage, Brian was recently

heard singing Judas in Bach's *Mattäuspassion* with The Philadelphia Orchestra under the baton of Maestro Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Since 2012, Brian has also sung in choirs under conductors such as Esa-Pekka Salonen, Gustavo Dudamel, and Daniel Barenboim at Carnegie Hall and Avery Fisher Hall. Also an avid recitalist, Brian has given eight full recitals in the past five years.



Brian is a native of Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and is an alumnus of The Oberlin Conservatory of Music (B.M. 2012) and Westminster Choir College (M.M. 2014).

Janie Brokenicky, mezzo-soprano, is a newly appointed instructor of music at Kansas State University, where she'll teach music theory and applied voice and is founding the Flint Hills Children's Choir. She just finished her three-year tenure as the Assistant Professor of Choral Music at Tabor College in Hillsboro, KS, where she conducted the women's choir and Concerto Bella Voce. Teaching honors include the 2009 Kansas Horizon Award for outstanding achievement as a first year teacher and the 2010 KCDA Young Director of the Year Award. She holds both Bachelors and Masters degrees in music

from Kansas State University. She has been a guest soloist with the Wichita Chamber Chorale, Kansas State University Symphony Orchestra, Fort Hays Symphony Orchestra, and Flint Hills Chorale. Last summer, she was the mezzo-soprano soloist for Mozart's *Requiem* with the Russell Summer Concert Series.



Francis Williams, a native of Long Island, NY, is pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Vocal Performance from Westminster Choir College in Princeton, NJ, where he is a voice student of Eric Rieger. At Westminster, he collaborates frequently with renowned pianist, JJ Penna. As a member of the 40-voice Westminster Choir, he has performed on tours in Oklahoma, Texas, and in California. With the Westminster Symphonic Choir, he has worked with conductors such as Jacques Lacombe, Yannick Nezet-Seguin, Daniele Gatti, and Joe Miller. He has performed with the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra at Carnegie Hall and Philadelphia's Kimmel Center. He worked as a chorister with the Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina for the past two summers, with directors such as John La Bouchardiere and Tony Award winner Garry Hynes.

Past credits include Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* (Almeric) with Westminster Opera Theatre, Handel's *Acis and Galatea* (Acis) with Westminster Opera Workshop, and John Adams' *El Niño* (Chorus), Janacek's *Kat'a Kabanova* with the Spoleto Festival USA. Francis is a tenor Young Artist with the Ad Astra Music Festival and will be singing the role of Jonathan in Handel's *Saul* and a set of Ned Rorem songs. In addition, he will be singing with the Ad Astra Chamber Choir and the Russell Community Choir.



Aani Bourassa, praised for her “powerful, yet sparkling high notes,” soprano, Aani Bourassa, is a versatile actress of emotional depth. During the 2014-2015 season, she performed the role of Kate Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* and Julia in scenes from Loren Maazel’s 1984 at the Castleton Festival. Ms. Bourassa will next be heading to Iowa to record a CD of previously unrecorded pieces by Carl Czerny.

Other recent performances include Elisabetta in scenes from *Maria Stuarda*, Juliette in scenes from *Roméo et Juliette*, Gilda in scenes from *Rigoletto*, Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* with the Bay View Music Festival and Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* with the Genesius Guild of the Quad Cities and the University of Illinois Opera Theater. Equally comfortable on the concert stage she has sung the soprano solos in Bach’s Cantata 140 (Iowa Wesleyan College Chorale), Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 (Southeast Iowa Symphony Orchestra), the Vivaldi Gloria (Holy Family Catholic Church), Bach’s Magnificat (Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra), and Haydn’s Lord Nelson Mass (Trinity Lutheran Seminary).

Ms. Bourassa received her Master’s Degree from the University of Illinois: Urbana Champaign where she studied with Yvonne Gonzales Redman. She currently lives in Urbana, IL with her husband.



Michael Davidson holds a Bachelor’s of Music degree in Voice from Loyola University New Orleans and a Master’s of Music degree in Voice from the University of Kansas. While at the University of Kansas, he was on stage in several operas including playing the role of Ferando in Mozart’s *Così fan Tutte*. Professionally, he has sung with both the New Orleans Opera and The Kansas City Lyric Opera choruses, as well as the Eutin Summer Opera Festival in Eutin, Germany. Michael has performed now in two choruses accompanying Plácido Domingo, and has worked with some of the nation’s foremost vocal coaches including John Wustman, Martin Katz, Russell Miller, and Leonardo Vordoni. Currently Michael teaches vocal music at Russell High School and Ruppenthal Middle School. Michael’s most recent projects include directing/producing *Cinderella* at RHS and directing music for *Godspell* at Barton County Community College.

Last summer, Michael performed a recital as part of the Russell Arts Council’s Summer Concert Series and this summer is featured on a joint recital with mezzo-soprano, Janie Brokenicky and pianist, Leann Hillmer. He’ll also sing the role of Witch of Endor in Handel’s *Saul*, the final performance of the Ad Astra Music Festival.



John Irving is currently pursuing a doctorate in choral conducting at the University of North Texas. At UNT he is conducting associate of its premier choral ensemble, the A Cappella Choir, and teaches an undergraduate course in conducting. Beginning this fall, he will serve as interim conductor of the Denton Bach Society. Previously, John was director of choral music at Fordham High School for the Arts in New York City where he prepared choirs for performances at Carnegie Hall and was founding choral workshop director to the Weill Music Institute's Count Me In program. He currently sings weekly services including choral evensong at Church of the Incarnation in Dallas. John earned a master's degree in choral conducting from

Westminster Choir College and a bachelor's degree in music education from the University of Texas at Austin.



Alex Underwood is the artistic director of the Ad Astra Music Festival. A native of Russell, Alex is working on a doctoral degree in Choral Conducting at the University of Illinois with Andrew Megill. He completed his Masters in Choral Conducting from Westminster Choir College in 2014 where he sang multiple times with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Simon Bolivar Venezuelan Youth Orchestra, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, and the London Philharmonia. Alex will conduct the Chamber Choir, High School Choir, and Community Choir performances.

Concert Underwriters

Anonymous
The City of Russell
John and Dianne Farmer
Friends of the Deines Cultural Center
Angela and Warren Gfeller
Nancy Holland
The Line Family, in honor of Jim and Cheryl Line
Vance and Deanna Ruggles
Frank and Linda Schulte

Musician Sponsors

About You Realty, Kendra Trueblood and Traci Wieger
Anonymous
Dennis and Lori Davidson
William Farmer and Stewart Rahtz
Owen and Edith McQuade
Marty Myers, Myers Furniture
Russell Arts Council
Russell County Convention and Visitors Bureau
Dan and Tracy Weinhold

Donors

Barton Exploration Inc. Oil & Gas
Michael and Diane Bender
New Concept Construction, Bob and Grace Blehm
Catherine Holland
Shaf Holland
Nancy Lane
Michael and Tonya Murphy
Steven and Raeleen Reinhardt
Russell Rotary Club
Robert and Lyla Schmitt
Susan Shank
Alan Templeton
Brad and Theresa Wagner

Contributors

Larry and Sandy Daugherty
Russell Co Attorney Drug Fund
Russell County Sheriff Drug Fund
Carol Funk
Sandra Krug
Gudenkauf and Malone

Acknowledgements

Thank You

Jeannine Byers-Long
Dustin Daugherty
Michael Davidson
Lana's Flower Company
Espresso Etc.
Rachel Hilger
Nancy Lane
Johnny Matlock
Andrew Megill
Nex-tech Wireless
Katy Oste
Bob and Nancy Piatt
Erin Renard
Dale and Nancy Schmitt
USD 407

Russell Arts Council

Kaylee A Karst, president/treasurer
Kendra Smith Trueblood, vice-president
Carol Funk
Andrea Garland
Linda Olson
Susan Shank
Alison Voos

Production Team

Katie Bruton, festival manager
Matthew Piatt, vocal coach
Erin Renard, stage director
Alex Underwood, artistic director

Upcoming Concerts

Handel's Saul

August 2nd, 2:00pm
First Presbyterian Church, Hays KS