

Dear Friends of The St. Cecilia Chorus and Orchestra,

It is with a sweet mixture of excitement and humility that I begin my appointment as Music Director of St. Cecilia. My predecessor, the late David Randolph, was one-of-a-kind, and his long tenure with St. Cecilia is astonishing to contemplate. In 1965, when David was appointed, gas cost 31 cents a gallon, the Beatles were releasing Help!, and Mary Quant was launching the miniskirt.

The world has come through a lot since then. If anything, the exalted choral masterworks are more relevant now than ever before. More needed. Fashions come and go (see “miniskirt,” above), but the values encoded in St. Cecilia’s DNA are enduring ones: nobility of purpose, a spirit of inquiry, mutual caring, love for music, and collective music-making. The volunteerism that supports the organization is remarkable, engendering a sense of commitment that infuses the rehearsals and performances with a tangible personal warmth. We all feel accountable, and that what we are doing matters greatly.

My responsibility as Music Director will be to ensure that St. Cecilia’s future is worthy of its past, to harness the group’s many strengths in the service of an ever developing artistry and institutional capacity. I know, because of the exhilarating experience we shared when we rehearsed and performed together in the spring, that St. Cecilia’s members, and Board, will be joyful, impassioned travelers on the journey we are about to undertake.

This season’s wonderful program was conceived prior to my arrival; I celebrate my good fortune. Handel’s Messiah has always represented to me something mythic and fundamental about the human condition; transcending any single religion or creed, it is a magnificent archetypical tale of a spiritual passage through darkness into light. The music is justly famous; it is that gripping, that luminous.

The planned works of Mozart and Schubert share qualities of their Viennese roots: buoyancy, tenderness, grace. Between them they cover a vast emotional spectrum. Verdi’s Requiem is something else again, an operatic show-down, in fullest Italian throttle, between life and death. I am often asked: why Requiems? The answer is simple: these are the works that, especially when heard in thrilling, flesh-and-blood performance, teach us to cherish being alive.

I look forward to greeting you at this season’s performances. Please be sure to say hello.

--Mark Shapiro