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Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir Celebrates 30 Years with Commissions and Premieres

The Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir presented a marquee concert titled *Making History* that showcased works commissioned by the Choir over the years. It was the artistic pinnacle of the 30th Anniversary Season of the Choir, which has been educating children throughout the San Francisco Bay area for three decades, and leading the charge into the unknown with its support of living composers and new works. Several world premieres were given, including a suite by Chicago composer Stacy Garrop titled *Songs of Joy and Refuge*, a suite by San Francisco composer Mark Winges and poet Denise Newman called *Water Doesn't Drown*, and a new work by PEBCC alumnus Eric Tuan called *I Sat Down Under His Shadow*. Further commissions performed included works by prominent composers Kirke Mechem, Pekka Kostianen, and Sue Bohlin, as well the music of alumni composers Reed Criddle and Margaret Ruenzel. The concert took place on Saturday, March 23, 2013, at the First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley.

Composer Mark Winges and San Francisco poet Denise Newman teamed together in their second joint project to create the suite *Water Doesn't Drown*, using water images to tie together a group of pieces about the stages of childhood and young adulthood: in fact, the stages of life represented by the musicians in the Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir. Winges and Geary have enjoyed a fruitful collaborative friendship, exchanging commissions for performances for the last 20 years. It was a performance of the commission Magic Strings that won PEBCC its first gold medal and first place at an international contemporary competition, (Kathaumixw, 1992) launching a stellar career of top prizes in competitions worldwide.

Commissioned in celebration of PEBCC's 30th anniversary, and generously sponsored by PEBCC parents Matt and Yvonne Rogers, Chicago based composer Stacy Garrop's *Songs of Joy and Refuge* was given its world premiere by PEBCC's high school mixed voice choir Ecco, conducted by Clifton Massey. Using texts by poet Sara Teasdale, Garrop's work expresses the exhilaration, joy and solace that singing can bring. Her work is deeply human, both communicative and emotive. Dr. Garrop, an Associate Professor and Head of Composition at the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University, has won numerous composition awards, including the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's Elaine Lebenbom Memorial Award, Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble's Harvey Gaul Competition, Raymond and Beverly Sackler Music Composition Prize, and two Barlow Endowment commissions. Garrop, who worked with Massey and his choir on her new piece, conferencing into rehearsals via Skype, also attended the premiere and spoke movingly on how much singing in choruses has helped her life.

Daybreak in Alabama, commissioned by "The Dean of American Choral Composers" Kirke Mechem, was also presented. Mechem, a prolific and widely performed composer for chorus, orchestra and opera, has written more than 250 works and with performances in over 40 countries. His latest commission features the words of Langston Hughes. Disguised as the simple dream of a child, it is a moving metaphor for Hughes's lifelong vision of justice and equality.

A fitting tribute to the 30th anniversary of the Choir was the performance of works by three

Choir alumni composers; Dr. Reed Criddle, Eric Tuan, and Margaret Ruenzel. Dr. Reed Criddle, Director of Choral Activities and Assistant Professor at Utah Valley University, where he conducts the Chamber Choir and Masterworks Chorale, and served as conductor of the UVU Symphony Orchestra, UVU Chamber Orchestra, and UVU Women's Choir. At the concert, Dr. Criddle conducted the west coast premiere of his work, *Pieta*. Alumnus Eric Tuan, recent Stanford graduate and professional singer in both choir and modern opera, had three commissioned works performed: an arrangement of *Johnson Boys*; the 2012 commission *The Angel*, with text by William Blake and conducted by Tuan, and the world premiere of *I Sat Down Under His Shadow*. And alumna Margaret Ruenzel's Wordsworth setting *I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud* was performed by the elite treble chamber group "Ancora" under the baton of celebrated conductor and Artistic Director of PEBCC, Robert Geary.

Rounding out the concert were further commissions by Pekka Kostianen, *The Cold Told a Tale to Me*, and Sue Bohlin, Composer and Associate Director of Ensemble for PEBCC, who will conduct or accompany her works *In Anchor Bay*, *Summer's Here*, and *The Birch Tree*.

Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir is grateful to *Bell Investment Advisors*, lead sponsors for the 30th Anniversary season.

The internationally acclaimed Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir has been offering children from throughout San Francisco's East Bay an outstanding program of choral training and performance. Founded in 1982 by Suzie Rahl, the Choir has established itself as a leading force in international choral activities and contemporary music under the leadership of Artistic Director Robert Geary. International tours every summer and a keen desire to meet, collaborate, and compete with choruses and singers of other cultures have led to high marks at prestigious festivals across the world, and to the creation of the Golden Gate International Choral Festival. The Choir regularly collaborates with major Bay Area arts organizations such as the Oakland East Bay Symphony, Cal Performances, the Mark Morris Dance Company, and the Berkeley West Edge Opera. Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir is featured in the upcoming film "Songs of Defiance" a documentary about the Laulupidu song festival in Estonia and is one of the very few choirs outside of Estonia invited to participate.

For additional information about the concert, or the programs of the Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir, please visit www.piedmontchoirs.org, or call 510.547.4441.

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