



SAN FRANCISCO CHORAL ARTISTS

Magen Solomon, Artistic Director

present

Postcards from abroad *I will not be home for Christmas*

“Group singing is common to all cultures. I wish everyone in the world could just stop for a moment and notice that our cultures are more alike than different. This concert celebrates that common bond.”

Magen Solomon, San Francisco Choral Artists’ artistic director

Saturday December 13, 2014, 8:00 pm

St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, 1111 O’Farrell Street, San Francisco 94109

Sunday December 14, 2014, 4:00 pm

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, 114 Montecito Avenue, Oakland 94610

Saturday December 20, 2014, 8:00 pm

St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, 600 Colorado Ave, Palo Alto 94306

TICKETS: \$30 at the door; discounts for advance purchase, seniors, and students.

<http://www.sfca.org> (415) 494-8149 info@sfca.org

Press contact: Wieneke Gorter - 650.387.1708 (press only) - wienekegorter@yahoo.com

San Francisco, November 17, 2014— Young girls dance in colorful dresses. A simple song is sung. A whole village gathers in a circle. The fire is lit, they watch it burn, and after it is out, they go back to their houses to eat. **Such is the North-Eastern Brazilian custom of burning the straw, greenery, and other decorations from the Nativity scenes at midnight on January 6. It has always been a powerful childhood memory for Californian-Brazilian composer Daniel Afonso.** This year, as Composer-in-Residence for SF Choral Artists, he made it into one of the “postcards” for their “Postcards from Abroad” Christmas program.

Widely recognized for his research and performances of Brazilian choral music in Brazil, the USA, and Europe, Afonso has been Director of Vocal and Choral Studies at CSU Stanislaus since 1999, and has been friends with SF Choral Artists' artistic director Magen Solomon all those years. During his first year in California, SF Choral Artists performed his "Na Bahia Tem" and invited him to the performance. **"Magen was one of the first to really welcome me to California, and as Composer-in-Residence for SFCA it feels like things have come full circle now,"** says Afonso.

The international program is arranged as an around-the-world trip which starts and ends in the USA. The program opens with late Marin composer Maia Aprahamian's "O Joyous Light." Solomon says: **"I really liked the idea of opening the program with this tranquil piece, that gently welcomes the evening light. I also love that one hears the strong influence of the music of Maia's Russian Orthodox Church."**

The first half further includes Fred Cummins' "Lent", then visits Canada, England, Norway and Latvia for Healey Willan's "The Three Kings," Ronald Roxbury's "Ave Maria," Kverno's well-known "Ave Maris Stella," and Andrejs Jansons' "Mekletaja Cels" (The Seeker's Path) all of which explore a range of moods and colors.

After Brahms' masterpiece "O Heiland reiß die Himmel auf" and Poulenc's jubilant Christmas motet "Hodie Christus natus est," the program travels east for Stravinsky's "Ave Maria" and a traditional Christmas chant from Guria in Georgia, "Guruli Alilo," arranged by assistant conductor Tina Harrington.

World premiere "A Russian Christmas card," ends the first half. Composer-Not-in-Residence Wayne Eastwood based this piece, written especially for these concerts, on one of the "Nativity Poems" of Joseph Brodsky, a Russian Jew who claimed to be a "Christian only by correspondence" but who celebrated the Western Christmas because he found it more richly developed than that celebrated by the Eastern Church. Eastwood's son translated the Russian poems into English. Eastwood explains:

"While Joseph Brodsky's poetry is generally confessional and sarcastic (and hard to make music out of), his Christmas poems throw open cultural doors and let us peek at his own, Eastern sense of the transcendent."

[...]

"The title of this composition is a nod to Brodsky's habit of seeking inspiration from the many postcards and magazine images he attached to every available surface of his study. Brodsky admitted that he may have once burned down a friend's dacha after taping some clippings to the friend's kitchen stove."

The second half of the concert carries us south, then east with music from less well-known musical traditions, and several works incorporating percussion, starting in Kenya. "Natufurahi Siku Ya Leo" (Let us rejoice this day!) is a call-and-response folk song for Christmas from the Taita people. Magen Solomon says: **"In that traditional culture, there are few notated compositions. Much of their huge repertoire is learned by rote**

and/or improvised. Boniface Mganga, probably the most famous living Kenyan conductor, captured the feeling of oral tradition in this composition. Very different from American arrangements of African music.”

After “Lína Avatára” (He Chose Birth Among Us), in which Gil Robbins mixes the meditative music of the Hindu culture with English paraphrases of Isaiah’s prophecy, we go back to the Black Sea. There, next to Georgia (visited in the first half of the program), lies Armenia, where on Three Kings, the traditional hymn “Ov Zarmanali” is sung.

Then on to Asia, for “Pengyou Ting!,” a celebratory hymn text set to a lively traditional pentatonic tune, and “Dona Nobis Pacem” by South Korean composer Hyun Chul Lee. Magen Solomon says: **“This is a very cool piece in three parts; he uses Korean traditional musical folk elements -- slides, grace notes, and exaggerated vibrato -- in the first and last parts. The middle section is more Western, fast and driving and building to a big climax. The piece ends with the choir in unison, returning to traditional Korean style.”**

After a stop in New Zealand for David Childs’ lush “Salve Regina,” the chorus—and their percussion instruments!— cross the Pacific to South America for Daniel Afonso’s Brazilian “A Nossa Lapinha” and “Hanacpachap cussicuinin,” a Christmas song in Quechua from Peru, first written down in 1631 by Spaniard Juan Perez Bocanegra. Magen Solomon says: **“I love this piece! It’s musically exciting and a very ‘open’ text -- words in Quechua can have multiple meanings so one can string the puzzle together in various ways. The text we’ll be printing in the program is only one possible translation.”**

The group heads north to finish at home with Roger Nixon’s “Carol.” Featuring the late Bay Area composer’s signature harmonies the work describes the wonder of the “spotless” maiden giving birth.

The closing piece, “Children, Go Where I Send Thee” is a traditional spiritual, arranged by Robert L. Morris. Solomon says: **“It manages to be both complex and innovative without losing the essence of this familiar spiritual -- lively, heartfelt, with a strong rhythmic groove. It really features our fine basses, and delights with surprising dynamic changes.”**

For biographies of Composer-in-Residence Daniel Afonso and Composer-Not-in-Residence Wayne Eastwood, please visit <http://www.sfca.org/composers-in-residence/>

To read more about the San Francisco Choral Artists, please got to <http://www.sfca.org/about-san-francisco-choral-artists/>

=END=