



The Voice of Orpheus

The Newsletter of Sons of Orpheus – the Male Choir of Tucson

Grayson Hirst, Founder/Artistic Director

VOLUME 14 ISSUE 2 - SPRING 2013

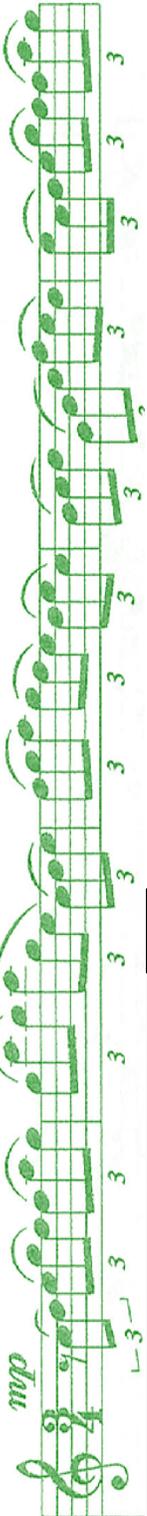
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Robert Couch, layout and design

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Spring 2013 Program Notes

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:



J. S. Bach's aria from the *Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D Major* is known popularly as "Air on the G String" from a famous arrangement of the piece by the 19th-century violinist, August Wilhelm, who transposed Bach's original work so that he could play the melody on the G string of his instrument, accompanied by a piano. The trick caught on and has been performed in many contemporary modes, such as a duet with cellist Yo Yo Ma and vocalist Bobby McFerrin; and the British band, Procol Harum, who lifted a portion of Bach's aria, gave it words, and called it "A Whiter Shade of Pale." Baritone Mike Fraser adapted the piece from the Ward Swingle choral arrangement. (Swingle founded the vocal groups he

called The Swingle Singers, winners of five Grammy Awards.) We will replicate the orchestral background behind Nicole Skaggs, a brilliant young violinist who has charmed our audiences and ourselves alike for the past two years. Nicole recently won a competition to sit as concertmaster of the Southern Arizona Regional Orchestra.

Mike has also adapted Swingle's choral arrangement of Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" that employs bass guitar and top-hat cymbal as a rhythm section. Caleb Yetman, Nicole's classmate at Canyon del Oro High School, will play the bass and join Lindsey McHugh (about whom, more below) on the cymbal while we endeavor to turn our vocal cords into the string section.

Bass Tom Wentzel has ar-

ranged the second movement of Henryk Mikolaj Górecki's *Symphony No. 3 (Symphony of Sorrowful Songs)* for soprano solo, men's choir, and piano four-hands. The text of the piece comes from a prayer scratched on a cell wall in the basement of the Gestapo headquarters in Zakopane, Poland. The prayer translated reads,

"No, Mother, do not weep. Most chaste Queen of Heaven Support me always. Hail Mary."

It is signed Helena Wanda Blazusiakówna. Beneath the signature are the words "18 years old, imprisoned since 26 September 1944."

Tom's performance notes inform the choir as follows: "The men's choral parts are drawn primarily from the large

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Our Spring Concert Schedule

We will present our Gala Spring Concerts at four locations this year, three of them new ones for us. We'll begin at a familiar venue in Green Valley, March 20th; then at the Casas Adobes Congregational Church April 7th. We'll perform at Temple Emmanu-El on Saturday, April, 20th; and finally in Coolidge, May 5th. Please see the schedule below for locations, performance times, and ticket information.

Wednesday March 20, 7:00 P.M. Community Performing Arts Center, 1250 W. Continental Rd. Green Valley AZ. Admission: \$15 in advance, \$18 at door. Call 520-399-1750 for tickets and reservations.

Sunday, April 7, 3:00 P.M. Casas Adobes Congregational Church, 6801 N Oracle Rd. Tucson AZ. Admission: \$18 (cash or check made out to Sons of Orpheus). For concert information, call 520-621-1649.

Saturday, April 20, 7:00 P.M. Temple Emanu-El, 225 N. Country Club Rd. Tucson AZ. For concert information, call 520-621-1649.

Sunday, May 5, 3:00 P.M. Coolidge Performing Arts Center, Coolidge AZ. Admission: \$15 in advance, \$18 at the door (cash or check made out to CUSD). For tickets in advance, go to www.sonsoforpheus.eventbrite.com Print ticket. For more information, call 520-723-2424.

Spring 2013 Program Notes (continued)

string section of the original orchestral score, so the voices need to imitate the sustained, even notes of the strings." The effect is a kind of otherworldly blending behind Russell Ronnebaum and Brent Burmeister at the piano, and soprano Lindsey McHugh who will sing the prayer in Polish. (People who heard Lindsey sing with us during the Christmas season have been clamoring to hear her again. Here's the chance.)

So, we'll have these three pieces to sing without needing to learn any words. To even things up, we'll perform Ernest Toch's "Geographical Fugue," which is spoken. It's a tricky text! The rehearsals for it are a bit nerve-wracking, but we'll have it perfected before we take it public.

Because there is nothing like a stirring processional to get a concert started, Tom Wentzel was asked to prepare "The Procession of the Nobles," from Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov's opera-ballet, *Mlada*. Here he had to do some real digging. Via the magic of the Internet, he located a piano four-hands reduction of the orchestral score by Garry Laycock in a library in New South Wales, Australia. Tom requested and received a limited permission from the library to use the reduction in our performances. Since Laycock had edited the piece to about three-quarters, Tom filled in the missing material with his own four-hands reduction, using an orchestral score provided by our director for source material. Creating the choral lines of the piece was another challenge. Our director came up

with a book of opera choruses that included not only the original choral parts written in Russian for mixed-voice choir, but also written in Western phonetics. Tom arranged the mixed-voice parts for men's voices and dropped in the phonetics. Several midnights later, Tom had the piece ready to hand out to the choir.

Nicole Skaggs will get another chance to shine in the second half of the program when she plays the theme song from the motion picture *Schindler's List*, the music composed by John Williams. Because we like to keep all our arrangers busy, baritone Jim Filipek was commissioned to fit into the violin piece two folk songs he arranged for men's voices. The first, "Oyfn Pripetshok" (On the Cooking Stove), is about a rabbi teaching the alphabet to his students, poignant because it is sung during an especially grim moment in the film. We will sing it in Yiddish.

The second of Jim's arrangements is the rousing "Yerushalaim Shel Zahav" (Jerusalem of Gold) which we'll sing in Hebrew and English. Then Nicole will resume her violin part and conclude the number. Jim's choral insertions work beautifully and naturally within the piece.



Russ & Brent Work Details

A real test for us is the well-known 19th-century folk song "Turkey in the Straw." It's a song everybody knows, but the version we'll sing is a catchy one with some odd rhythms, noisemaking, and choreography that will require us to put down our music folders and memorize. If you see a man standing at a street corner, a faraway look in his eyes, mouthing words, clapping his hands and stamping his feet, don't worry about being asked for a handout. It's probably just one of us using time wisely to get the thing solidly into our heads by the first time we perform it on March 20th. It will conclude our "cowboy set" and the concert. We hope to see you there.

Hogan's Challenge

Our fifteenth annual holiday Food Bank fundraiser was a record breaker. Orpheus performed with kids from ASDB, soprano Lindsey McHugh, and the award-winning mariachi band, Sonida de México. Our audience has grown through the years as more people hear about this wonderful concert. The audience donated \$1,775 at the door, and brought in 553 pounds of food. We opened our wallets and canvassed our neighborhoods to bring the total take for the campaign to \$12,126.

Much of the credit goes to our own Jim Hogan, whose fifth consecutive challenge to the choir cost him yet again. Jim bets us he can raise more money for the Food Bank all by himself than the rest of us together. Jim has the connections, but we have the numbers. So far we have always won the prize-free pizza and beer: the great motivators. We'll invite Jim to have a few slices and a pint or two with us, and we'll be proud to sit down with him—the driving force behind this important fundraiser.

OUR CHORUS

First Tenors:

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

Second Tenors:

Dave Burns
Darwin Hall
Jim Hogan
Bob Kurtz
Richard Miller
Mike Negrete
Doug Nordell
Ken Rosenblatt
Larry Ross
Larry Sayre

Baritones:

Mike Bradley
Bob Couch
Terry DeGrenier
Chuck Dickson
John Evans
Jim Filipek
Cameron Fordyce
Michael Fraser
Jim Kitchak
Ned Mackey
Rick Sack
Jerome Wozniak

Basses:

Matthew Boberg
Jeffrey Handt
Tom Kane
George Ledbetter
Gary Smyth
Eugene Stevick
Thomas Wentzel
Woon-Yin Wong



Spring Appeal

Sons of Orpheus is an amateur choir that supports itself with \$120 per-man annual dues and by the sale of concert tickets, CDs, ads in our spring concert program booklet, grants from various agencies, and gifts from our newsletter readers. Although we perform without charge for such organizations as the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System, Tucson Homicide Survivors, and TMC Hospice, several organizations pay us our services.

So, we find a variety of ways to stay afloat and we sing for our supper, but we need our newsletter readers to help us too. Please think of the remittance envelope you find herein as an artery that pumps lifeblood into our organization from the heart of the community.

Your donations go into the kitty to pay our director, our accompanists, our sheet music and printing bills, insurance costs, and charges for rehearsal and performance space. We provide a stipend for our student singers and we pay our instrumentalists as well as our soprano soloists. (If ever proof were needed that men cannot live without women, it can be found in our repertoire.)

You can use the envelope to [1] **make a donation to our general fund**, [2] **purchase CDs** (Please see our CD lineup on page 5). The cost is \$10 for one CD and \$5 per each thereafter. Include \$4 for shipping. A CD mailer can hold two CDs), and [3] **buy chances for a \$100 gift certificate from Fleming's Prime Steakhouse and Wine Bar**, a consistent and generous contributor to the Orpheus cause. A \$10 contribution will get your name on a ticket. \$20 will get you two tickets, etc. The drawing for the Fleming's gift certificate will take place at the end of the spring concert season. The winner will be notified by phone or by mail.

Other restaurants have given us gift certificates as well. Raffle tickets for them will be sold only at each of the four spring concert venues, one ticket for \$5, three for \$10. Winners will be notified by phone or by mail.

Sons of Orpheus is a not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization. Donors to our general fund receive a formal acknowledgment for their records. The choir's gratitude for your purchases will come to you via good wishes.

Fox Theatre Performance

On the evening of March 2, the Sons of Orpheus helped Rabbi Sam Cohon and Friends celebrate the tenth anniversary of the lively and fast-paced "Too Jewish" radio program at the historic Fox Theatre in downtown Tucson. Tickets cost as much as \$102. The radio variety show was then broadcast the next morning on Tucson's KVOI AM and Douglas's KAPR AM.

From the stage of this Southwestern art deco movie palace, the Sons of Orpheus performed Ernest Gold's award-winning "Exodus Song" from the 1960 epic film *Exodus*. Although Pat "White Bucks" Boone added English words in 1961 ("This Land is Mine"), because Orpheus values authenticity, we sang it in Hebrew. We had previously sung this arrangement at the 2008 Leipzig International Choral Festival.

In addition to the Sons of Orpheus, the show featured comedian Robert Klein, Mayor Jonathan Rothschild, U.S. Rep. Ron Barber, Amy Hirshberg Lederman, Rabbi Billy Lewkowicz, the Avanim Rock Band, and a variety of other talented contributors.

Proceeds from the event benefited (1) Jewish Family & Children's Services of Southern Arizona, providing high-quality, caring social and behavioral health services to Southern Arizonans for more than seventy years; (2) Rabbi Cohon's Temple Emanu-El, a Reform synagogue that was the first synagogue in the Arizona Territory; and (3) Tucson Hebrew Academy, a K-8 school that has repeatedly been recognized for its educational excellence.

—Charles Dickson

The Musicologist

Absolute white but for a black patch centered ear to ear and a tail black from root to tip, Maryann's cat catches me reading sheet music. Blasé about intrusion, she leaps to the table and angles in purring. Tail aloft: a quarter note.

She likes anything paper, likes how it sounds pounced on, especially if it's crumpled and tossed; and how it smells and tastes—redolent of trees she's climbed. I shoo her down. Leave it to desire, she'll digest the score before I do.

—Ned Mackey



Orpheus has participated in the San Xavier Christmas concerts every year from the one Linda Ronstadt organized in 1998, but the experience is never old hat for us. As we stood looking in from the doorway, ready to begin the processional, the candlelit splendor of the place was as stunning as it was the first time we saw it. As though to show that beauty is more than skin deep, the old mission showed off her brilliant acoustic the moment the music started.

The opening words of the processional—"Let all mortal flesh keep silence"—were ironic. By the time the men and boys were in place and had turned to face the audience, and the organ and the brass quintet were fully engaged, the ancient walls fairly vibrated with the closing alleluias and amens.



San Xavier, December 10–13, 2012

Orpheus Stands Tall at San Xavier, and Long

As I write this on December 14th, the day after the last of the six San Xavier Christmas concerts, my vocal cords are still flapping. And my knees are still squeaking. We stood on the risers for a two-and-a-half-hour rehearsal on Monday afternoon, December 10th, then two one-hour concerts on each of the next three nights. Add another 30 minutes for rehearsing and warming-up to get us going before the six o'clock concert each night and you have an extra hour and a half. That's ten hours on my 75-year-old-knees in four days. My vocal cords are only 63 years old because I didn't start singing till I was twelve, so they'll be OK in a couple of days. But the knees are going to need some time.

The San Xavier Pet Adoption Agency

Each year Ken Yukl of Allen Organs Arizona, provides a magnificent organ and speaker system for the San Xavier concerts. Last year he adopted a stray dog that wandered around in the church during the Monday rehearsal—a packed house as always. Word of the adoption must have gotten out because this year three dogs and a cat strolled among the visitors. Again Ken took charge of the situation. From the risers we watched him pick up the cat and carry it toward the door. Then we saw him drop his burden abruptly when the cat took it into its head to stick around until ready to leave on its own. Ken's gesture was a futile one, cats being what they are, but we applauded his effort anyway. And it turned out that the cat *was* adopted. One of the visitors who had come in for a

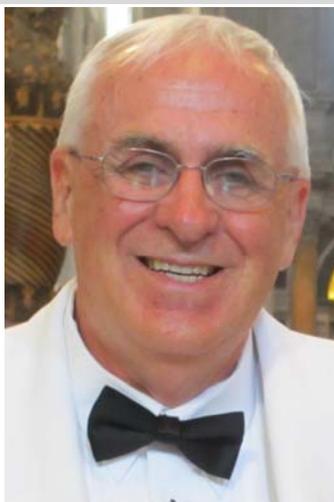
free concert, wound up with a free cat as well. It's a safe bet the drive home was an interesting one.

Singing in the Rain

Local dry cleaners are likely to see a rise in business before we begin our spring season. Our tuxedos endured seven sweaty wearings during the holidays, starting with the first concert at the Berger Center for the Performing Arts on December 2nd and on through Tucson Estates, Green Valley, SaddleBrooke, and finally the three nights at San Xavier. On the third night the tuxes got wet from the outside too as we waited in the drizzle to begin the processions for the six o'clock and eight o'clock concerts. The Tucson Arizona Boys Chorus followed us in and got wetter than we did, but they enjoyed it.

—NM

Profiling Dave Burns



DAVE ON OUR ITALY TOUR

This is Dave's fourth year with Orpheus. He is not only a fine singer, he is the kind of member every organization needs: a person who pitches in to help in many ways. He is a member of the Long-Range Planning Committee, the Publicity Action Team, and the Riser Crew.

Dave grew up in Hardin, Montana, a small town near the Little Big Horn Battlefield National Monument. Within the Monument is the Custer National Cemetery, and it was there that Dave was the star of the show on a dozen or more occasions.

During Dave's high school days, the Hardin American Legion Post was responsible for the funeral ceremonies for veterans who were laid to rest in the Monument. Dressed in their American Legion uniforms, riflemen fired a three-volley salute, and then, hidden behind a tree, young Dave played "Taps" on his trumpet. The effect was magical, the notes coming, as it seemed, right out of the heavens.

Dave put his trumpet away long ago and took up the guitar. For the last eight years he has had lessons from the well-known Tucson guitarist, Bill Ganz. Dave says his guitar-playing so far remains firmly

grounded, but the change was undoubtedly a heavenly one for Nancy, his wife.

Dave grew up with music. His mother was a pianist; he sang in church and high school choirs in Hardin until he went off to Montana State University in Bozeman and prepared for a career in architecture. He graduated from Montana State in 1970, spent eleven years working in Montana until taking a job in Tucson in 1983. "That was," he says with a laugh, "the same year Lute Olson came to town and the year of the great Tucson flood."

As the Design Principal for the last 20 years at Burns Wald-Hopkins Architecture, Inc., Dave works on toward the end of what has been a meritorious career. He plans to retire at the end of December, and he can look back at awards such as the Arizona Architects Medal in 2006 and certifications by such groups

as the U.S. Green Buildings Council.

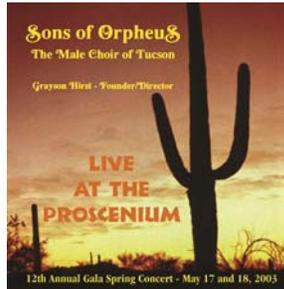
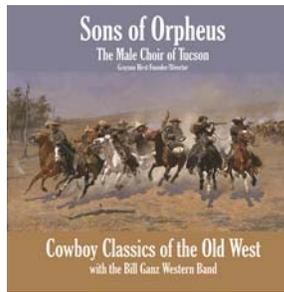
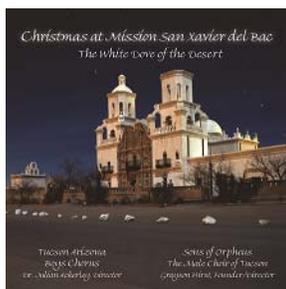
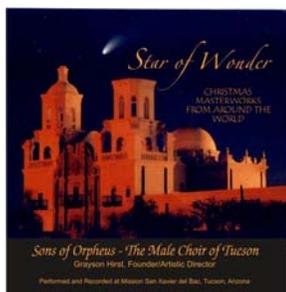
One building Dave's firm designed is especially important to Orpheus. It is the Community Performing Arts Center, an auditorium in Green Valley where we have sung and where we will be singing again on March 20th. We hope that in a couple of years the Green Valley folks will invite us to sing in a larger auditorium that is already on the drawing board at BWH Architects, Inc., awaiting the passage of a bond issue in the fall.

Dave's hobbies include a love of the history of the American West. An avid cyclist, he has ridden in the Tour de Tucson several times. He's a hiker too, and is planning an August trip with four friends into the Sperry Chalet in Glacier National Park. It'll mean 12 rugged miles in and another four rugged miles out by another route. Our singing season ends in May, so we trust that he will make use of the time off to train adequately. We do not want to read about this trip in the newspaper.

Sons of Orpheus CDs For Sale

We proudly present our most current line-up of CDs, which features our newest album, *Star of Wonder*, Christmas Masterpieces from Around the World, performed and recorded live at Mission San Xavier del Bac, as guests of the Tohono O'odham Nation.

Our CD repertoire includes sacred music from around the world (sung in English, Latin, Italian, French, Ladino, Church Slavonic and even Nigerian), classical choral favorites, popular passages from many operas, and of course the best cowboy songs from the Western music genre.





World-Famous Musician also a Well-Known Scientist by Larry Ross

At age 16, Albert Einstein vowed to become a theoretical physicist. To celebrate his decision, he invited one of his friends to accompany him on the piano in a Mozart sonata. His friend never forgot what happened next: "When his violin began to sing, the walls of the room seemed to recede. For the first time Mozart in all his purity appeared before me, bathed in Hellenic beauty with its pure lines, roguishly playful, mightily sublime." Ironically, music was said to be the vehicle in which Einstein sealed all his emotions in order to avoid dealing with interpersonal relationships.

Einstein was not shy about his opinions of the great composers. Of Bach Einstein said, "Listen, play, love, revere—and keep your trap shut." He thought Handel interesting but somewhat shallow. Beethoven was too melodramatic, and besides, he "created" his music rather than, as did Mozart, pluck melodies out of the air as if they were ever-present in the universe. (Einstein felt that he worked like Mozart, not merely devising theories, but responding to nature, in tune with the cosmos.)

He considered some of Brahms's compositions to be significant, but said of him "most of his works have for me no inner persuasiveness—I do not understand why it was necessary to write them." Einstein thought Richard Strauss gifted but concerned only with outside effects; Debussy was "delicately colorful but shows a poverty of structure." After a performance of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* at the Bern Opera in 1908, Einstein remarked "Wagner is, God forgive me, not to my taste." In 1939, Einstein stated his opinion of Wagner's compositions even more forcefully: "To me his musical personality is indescribably offensive so that for the most part I can listen to him only with disgust."

Albert Einstein's acknowledged musical devotion and talent, and his idealism, sublime intelligence, and impeccable reasoning give some force to his musical criticism, if not the explosiveness of $E=mc^2$.

Editor's note: Larry Ross, himself a musician and a scientist (cardiologist), is a member of our second tenor section and the president of the Board of Directors of Sons of Orpheus.

Who the Heck is Orpheus?

Because we have new readers and audience members who ask this question, now and then we tell the story of the mythical Greek hero whose name we and men's choirs around the world have taken.

Orpheus was the son of the god Apollo. His mother was Calliope, the muse of epic poetry. Orpheus was a poet and singer who accompanied himself on a lyre given him by his father. His music had the power to charm humans and beasts alike, and even inanimate objects. After Orpheus' wife, Eurydice, died of a serpent's sting, Orpheus journeyed to the underworld to plead for her return. Hades allowed Orpheus to lead her home on the condition that he not look back until they reached the surface.

When their trek was almost at an end, Orpheus began to suspect that Hades had tricked him. He turned to check and saw Eurydice snatched away from him forever.

That's the story, told without even the hint of the pathos written into it by the likes of Pindar or Virgil or Plato.

An 18th century teller of the tale, the Bavarian-born composer Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714-1787), added a diabolical twist in his rendition. His opera was first performed in Italian, and 12 years later in a French adaptation, *Orpheus et Euridice*. Gluck's Hades admonishes Orpheus not to tell Eurydice why he can't look at her on the journey upward. Orpheus' silence causes Eurydice to assume that he no longer loves her. She turns back,

concluding that death is preferable to life without her beloved.

"J'ai perdu mon Euridice," an aria in act 3, inspired Pulitzer Prize winner Louise Glück, America's Poet Laureate for 2003-04, to add her own touch, a keen evocation of Orpheus' grief. The following is an excerpt.

Orpheo

"J'ai perdu mon Euridice"

*I have lost my Eurydice,
I have lost my lover,
and suddenly I am speaking
French
and it seems to me I have
never been in better voice;
it seems these songs
are songs of a high order.*

*O Eurydice, you who married me for my singing,
why do you turn on me,*

wanting human comfort?

*Who knows what you'll tell the Furies
when you see them again.*

*Tell them I have lost my beloved;
I am completely alone now.
Tell them there is no music like
this without real grief.*

We do not presume to possess the power Apollo gave our mythical founder, but Grayson Hirst, our actual founder, has chosen songs of a high order. He'll have us in fine voice come spring, without, we pray, requiring grief.

Editor's note: You'll find wonderful renditions of this aria on YouTube, including one by Maria Callas, who sings the piece re-written for her voice. You can also hear a sound clip of Louise Glück reading her poem. They can be accessed by the following links.

<http://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=Youtube+j'ai+perdu+mon+Euridice&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

http://www.slate.com/content/dam/slate/archive/media/2001/10/13000_13142_poem_gluckl_orfeo.asf



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Sons of Orpheus – the Male Choir of Tucson

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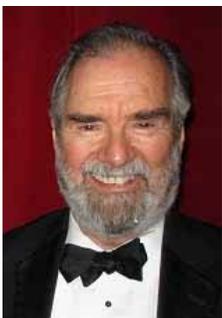
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TUCSON'S AMBASSADORS OF SONG



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Our Sponsors

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.



We're on the web at
www.SonsOfOrpheus.org

Want More Information?

We invite you to go to our web site and look through the repertoire Grayson Hirst has chosen for our first 21 years. While you're at it, please consider sending us your email address so we can add you to our electronic list. Please write us at:

contact1@SonsOfOrpheus.org

We'll send you a heads-up whenever the newsletter or other information is online. You can see our newsletters in color and save us some postage for snail mail.

IF YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS, QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS, ABOUT THE VOICE OF ORPHEUS. PLEASE EMAIL US.