

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The St. Cecilia Chamber Choir celebrated its fifteenth anniversary last weekend with a great many guests in attendance.

A near capacity crowd thronged the Second Congregational Church in Newcastle. People began lining up to enter a full hour before the 7:30 concert started. At the Camden First Congregational Church (the church in which Linda Blanchard and Sean Fleming were married) Sunday afternoon, the pews were close to full despite this being the first St. Cecilia concert performed in Camden,

First on the program was Leonard Bernstein's dramatic powerhouse, *Chichester Psalms*, in Hebrew. The music ranges from lush, gentle pianissimo passages accompanied by organ and harp to bombastic fortissimo, with loud emphasis contributed by percussionist Nancy Rowe. Based on six Old Testament psalms, some of the music was first written for the prologue of *West Side Story*. When the prologue was dropped in pre-Broadway tryouts, Bernstein decided to incorporate part of it into the *Psalms*, in a section where the text is "why do the nations rage?" **The first and third movements were enhanced with a quartet by Jacqueline Merritt, soprano; Nan White, alto; Del Merritt, tenor; and Stephen J. White, bass.**

But the moment the audience was awaiting came in part II, in which 12-year-old Johannes Moore sang the beautiful treble solo sections based on the Twenty-third Psalm, "The Lord is My Shepherd." His clear, confident and well-trained voice filled the church.

Following the Bernstein, the audience rewarded the young British guest soloist with a rare mid-concert standing ovation. This spontaneous tribute was repeated at the Camden concert. Director Linda Blanchard explained to audiences that she was thrilled with the good fortune that "Jo" was the boy soprano soloist in this piece she had long wanted to perform, that his school vacation happened to coincide with her concerts, and that his mother agreed to fly with him to Maine.

Jo's uncle, Richard Bates, sings in the choir's tenor section, and had arranged the invitation. Jo Moore is Head Chorister at Hereford Cathedral, where he has sung since age seven.

The audience next heard the lovely "Cantique de Jean Racine" in French, by Gabriel Faure, again beautifully accompanied by Suki Flanagan on harp.

After intermission, the program resumed with Mozart's *Missa Brevis* in C, or "Spatenmesse" (Sparrow Mass.) This six movement choral work, accompanied by organ, string quartet, trumpets and timpani, included lovely solo quartet passages in the Gloria, Credo, Benedictus and Agnus Dei movements sung by soprano Ruth Monsell, alto Nan White, tenor Del Merritt and bass Sandy Falconer.

The audience thrilled with the return of young Johannes to sing the treble solo in the Magnificat by Charles Villiers Stanford, in which his high, sweet voice had a chance to truly soar. By the piece's end, there were more than a few tears visible in the audience.

The concerts concluded with the royal wedding anthem by Mathias, composed for the marriage ceremony of Prince Charles and Lady Diana thirty years ago. Blanchard explained that it was a perfect choice not only to honor the just-celebrated wedding of William and Catherine, but because it was one of the pieces sung at St. Cecilia's first concert 15 years ago. Following a second and lengthy standing ovation, everyone adjourned to another room for punch, anniversary cake and assorted goodies.

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