

World Premiere Performance: "Musicians of the Sun"

by Naomi Kennedy

Musicians of the Sun, featured in a concert celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Orange County Classic Choral Society, promises to be a tour de force. Composer and orchestrator Steve Margoshes has adapted illustrator and Caldecott Medalist author Gerald McDermott's storybook, of the same name, into an extraordinary musical score.

Fourteen years ago, David De Silva, producer of the MGM motion picture *Fame*, suggested Margoshes put *Musicians of the Sun* to music. Steve wrote half of the music quickly, but found the remaining text not quite "adaptable for song." The book sat on Steve's shelf until recently when Janiece Kohler, the director and conductor of the Classic Choral Society heard one of his compositions performed by the Greater Newburgh Symphony Orchestra. "We knew it would be very exciting to have an internationally known composer (who also happens to be an Orange County resident!) create a piece for this occasion, but we never thought in a million years this event would reach the heights it has!" said Kohler.

CCS' managing director and tenor Dr. James Zgoda, contacted Steve with news of the society's 50th Anniversary. After all these years, I decided to try again to write music for this book, hoping it would work for this great choral society," said Margoshes.

This beautifully illustrated fable based on Aztec legend, describes how music found its way to earth. As the story unfolds, the Lord of the Night sends Wind on a journey to free four little musicians, named Red, Blue, Yellow, and Green, held captive by the Sun. After they are rescued, the four musicians return "color" to the unhappy people of the dreary world. Now filled with joyous and celebratory people, the earth is vibrant once again.

This musical piece was written for chorus, orchestra, and narrator. Walden resident, film and theater actor Samuel E. Wright, creator of the leading role of "Mufasa" of *The Lion King* and the voice of "Sebastian the Crab" in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, will read the story to us, as the members of the chorus become the characters.

Kohler found this project an enriching experience. "Steve's a very gracious and very intense person. I was amazed and delighted to work with him and experience his composition process, learning as he implemented the voice groups as story characters," said Kohler.

Maestra Kohler, a Monroe resident, is Minister of Music at the First Presbyterian Church in Washingtonville and organist at the Blooming Grove United Church of Christ. She earned her degree in Vocal Performance from the Western Michigan University School of Music in Kalamazoo and continued her education at the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien (University of Music and the



Classic Choral Society performing at the Blooming Grove United Church of Christ in 2004

Performing Arts - Vienna, Austria).

Her credits include solo appearances with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and the Grand Rapids Symphony Orchestra, and directing Broadway productions in numerous locales such as the New Vic Theatre in Kalamazoo, MI. She recently retired from a thirty-year career in Repertory Research at ASCAP's NYC headquarters. Ms. Kohler frequently



Janiece Kohler



Samuel E. Wright



Steve Margoshes

conducts and adjudicates young singers for the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) and facilitates its choral music reading sessions for music teachers in Orange County.

The four musicians in the story play instruments portrayed by the voices of the choir. Drums, flute, shell (used as a primitive wind instrument), and a rattle bring to life sounds of these instruments and the characters. An orchestra of 30 musicians including strings, woodwinds, brass, harp, piano, and percussion (using several African instruments), will accompany a 70 person chorus.

"Theatrical subtext in a musical score is an important aspect in my work. There is never a shortage of things to work on; I go from one inspiration to the next," said Margoshes. The tale of *Musicians of the Sun*, and the "outstanding and stunning" illustrations and artwork, have been inspirational to Steve.

Mr. Margoshes orchestrated and conducted songs for the original MGM movie *Fame*, and composed and orchestrated the original score of *Fame: The Musical*. The latter is still performed on every continent in thirteen languages. He also collaborated with *Hair* authors, James Rado and Gerome Ragni, on

countless songs.

Steve's extensive background encompasses scores for ABC and NBC after-school movies and orchestrations for major Broadway musicals such as *Tommy*, *Aida*, *Grease*, and *Big River*. The European production of *Roman Polanski / Jim Steinman's version of Dance of the Vampires* features Margoshes' orchestrations. He is the composer of the musical *Fame Forever*, a sequel to *Fame: The Musical*. Presently he is creating a ballet version of *Fame Forever*. Margoshes, a Julliard graduate, has received two Drama Desk Awards for orchestrations.

The Orange County Classic Choral Society after fifty years continues to contribute to the rich cultural, educational, and aesthetic environment of our Hudson Valley. This Choral Society includes men and women ranging from the ages of 18-80's. Several of the




Accompanist/Composer/Conductor Jimrae K. Lenser, Steve Margoshes and Janiece Kohler working together.

original members are still part of this choir. The high quality choral music of OCCCS can be enjoyed, free of charge, at various venues throughout Orange County. In 1959, the Choral Society performed Handel's *Messiah* for their first concert. On December 19, 2009 at 7pm, a 50th year anniversary performance of the *Messiah* will take place at First Presbyterian Church in Goshen.

Singers at every level of expertise can join without being auditioned. Members come from Orange, Rockland, Ulster, Sullivan, Dutchess, and Westchester counties, as well as northern NJ and northeastern PA. "I try to get as close to a professional sound as I can. In this choir I have the pleasure and humbling responsibility of working with some of the best singers, such as soprano Jody Weatherstone who worked with Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine. Equally important and very rewarding to me is the challenge of working with those singers who simply like to sing in a choir!" said Kohler.

The 50th Anniversary celebration concert, *Musicians of the Sun*, will be held at the Blooming Grove United Church of Christ on November 1 at 4:00pm, and November 8 at 4:00pm. Included on the program is Morten Lauridsen's *Lux Aeterna*. Steve will of course be attending the gala affair and is in hope that Mr. McDermott, who expressed excitement, will also attend.

For information call 845-928-6462.



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Sunday, November 8, 2009
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