

Arts & Entertainment

Oratorio Singers' 'St. Augustine' Paves Road to Redemption

By ERIC NIERSTEDT
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — On March 30, Westfield's Oratorio Singers gathered in the First United Methodist Church in Westfield to perform a classic Mozart mass, and to debut a new composition, "Saint Augustine," a cantata composed by longtime Oratorio Musical Director Trent Johnson.

"I decided to do this both as an experiment in vocal direction, and because there isn't really a major piece on Augustine," said Mr. Johnson. "His story is about being a sinner and all the mistakes he made, yet he still redeemed himself at the end. It is a message that I think is important for people to hear."

Mr. Johnson spent seven months composing his work and studying Augustine's confessions. That hard work was in evidence on Sunday, as the Oratorio Singers brought it to life with a full orchestra and soloists behind them.

The singers themselves brought powerful choir voices to the piece alternating between dark tones and gentle undercurrents. The soloists were also impressive, each bringing strong voices to the characters of Augustine (tenor Rufus Muller), his devoted mother (soprano Rachel Rosales), and the priest (bass Kevin Maynor) that helped him find salvation.

It also helped that Mr. Johnson wrote his story in English, which allowed the modern audience to better grasp the story being told.

Mr. Johnson's music was also a strong factor, as his words fit with the story progression. The bassoons emphasized the darkness of Augustine's lament, while the tone brightened afterwards as he thanked his mother for always supporting him (an impressive switch in only two movements). Mr. Johnson even added a slight marching beat when Augustine announced his journey to redemption.

After debuting the cantata, there

was a short intermission before a performance of Mozart's "Grand Mass In C Minor," which added second soprano Maureen Francis. While still musically strong, the piece unfortunately suffered slightly due to its placement. While expertly performed, the Mass was also in Latin, which was somewhat harder to follow after the English performance. Still, the piece was impressive vocally and instrumentally.

It was also unique for patrons unfamiliar with these classic masses, as the programs gave transcriptions in both Latin and English. In doing so, it showed how much of these classic masses has survived into the modern day.

Mr. Johnson, who has performed with the Oratorio Singers for 20 years, stated that he would be interested in composing another piece, provided he can find the right subject.

Given the strength of his first cantata, it would be time well spent.

'Do It Yourself Picture Framing' at WAA Meeting

WESTFIELD — On Sunday, April 13, the Westfield Art Association (WAA) will host Stefanie Lalor, owner of The Artist Framer in Cranford, who will present "Do It Yourself Picture Framing." The presentation will introduce the various components involved in picture framing.

A basic understanding of the artistry of choosing a framing design, picture framing equipment and the various techniques for matting, mounting and glazing will be discussed.

Born in Westfield, Stefanie graduated from Westfield High School, Class of 1988. She received her bachelors from the University of Pittsburgh in 1994. Her concentration was on studio arts and art history. She received her Masters of Fine Arts in 1997 from The Graduate School of Figurative Art, also known as The New York Academy of

Town Book Store Hosts

Author Lisa Bleich

WESTFIELD — The Town Book Store is hosting a Meet and Greet for Lisa Bleich, author of "Surviving the College Application Process" on Saturday, April 5, from 2 - 4 p.m.

Does the college application process overwhelm you? Unsure about the topic for your main essay or which school is the right fit? "Surviving the College Application Process: Case Studies to Help You Find Your Unique Angle for Success" is organized so you can find profiles of students whose resemble pieces of yourself. Read all of the case studies, or just those that resonate with your own circumstances.

With the strategies outlined, you will be well on your way to surviving the college application process.

Lisa Bleich, founder and president of College Bound Mentor, LLC, mentors students from all over the world on the college application process, helping them uncover their strengths and develop a personal plan for success. Lisa holds a BA in European cultural studies and French from Brandeis University and an MBA from Harvard Business School. She lives in Westfield with her husband and three daughters; two of them have successfully survived the college application process!

Meet Lisa Bleich at The Town Book Store located at 270 East Broad Street in Westfield (corner of East Broad and Elmer Streets). If you are unable to attend this event, feel free to call The Town Book Store at (908) 233-3535 to reserve an autographed copy of Surviving the College Application Process.



MEET THE CAST...Cranford Dramatic Club (CDC) Children's production of Dear Edwina returns for three performances to CDC Theatre on Friday, April 11, at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday, April 12, at noon and 3 p.m. The audience is invited to have milk and cookies with the cast after each show and learn how to "Sing Your Own Song" with Edwina and her friends.

Enjoy Milk and Cookies With Cast of Dear Edwina

CRANFORD — Cranford Dramatic Club (CDC) Children's production of Dear Edwina returns for three performances to CDC Theatre on Friday, April 11, at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday, April 12, at noon and 3 p.m.

The star of her own show, Edwina Spoonapple, invites the audience to have cookies and milk with the cast after each show. Learn how to "Sing Your Own Song" with Edwina and her friends.

General admission tickets are \$12 and may be purchased at the door. For more information visit www.cdtheatre.org. CDC Theatre is at 78 Winans Avenue in Cranford.

Funding for this production has been made possible in part by the New Jersey State Council of the Arts, Department of State, a partner agency of the National Endowment of the Arts, through a grant administered by the Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs.



ADVICE FROM A STAR...Broadway's Okieriete (Oak) Oneodowan, a veteran of the New Jersey Youth Theatre (NJYT), visits the NJYT studio recently during evaluation week. Pictured, front row, left to right, are: Erica Morreale, Alyssa Kempinsky and Cynthia Meryl. Pictured, on bench are: Shabazz Green, Adam Biner, Vicki Patik and Oak. Pictured standing are: Chris Centinarro, Tess McGuinness, Veronica Walton, Isabella Gelfand, Bridget Coughlin, Jesse Zimmerman and Ryan Soldati. Pictured, back row, are: Greta Crandall, Amy Duellly, Madi Rosenthal, Jacqueline Daaleman and Deirdre Koczur. See story page 19.



MOZART MASS...The Oratorio Singers perform a classic Mozart mass, and debut a new composition, "Saint Augustine," a cantata composed by longtime Oratorio Musical Director Trent Johnson performed at the First United Methodist Church in Westfield on March 30.

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I could not have asked for better service and professionalism from David Realty Group. My home was not one that had many comparables so our realtors spent lots of time trying to make my husband and I comfortable with pricing. They had our home sold in 4 days, 14K over ask and we had a choice of 3 contracts! I always had a question answered immediately because if I couldn't get David on the phone, I'd get Lorena or vice versa. I can't imagine ever selling a house again without them! Thank you both!

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"In a challenging, competitive market this year, our house hunt in Westfield was made easier, smoother and even fun with your guidance and professional assistance. Your expertise in navigating the search, negotiation, inspections and other issues involved with buying a house was invaluable. Thank you for helping us to get it done!"

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