Portland Symphonic Choir

Struck by Portland's lack of a civic chorus, C. Robert Zimmerman decided to start one at the end of World War II. Of the 150 singers who auditioned in August 1945, he selected 80. They met to rehearse on September 5, and at the next rehearsal the singers chose the organzation's permanent name, the Portland Symphonic Choir (PSC). The choir's mission was "to sing the choral masterworks with excellence and passion; and to engage, educate, enrich and inspire its members and the community." Its first major concert was in December 1945, with a performance of Handel's *Messiah*.

PSC was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1947-1948, and Zimmerman took a season's leave to study choral conducting with Robert Shaw at Tanglewood in the Berkshires and the Juilliard Institute in New York City. Zimmerman led the choir until 1961. He was followed by Frank Holman (1963-1973), David Wilson (1974-1978), Bruce Browne (1979-2001), and Steven Zopfi (2003-). Other conductors led PSC for at least a season: Karl Ernst (1947-1948), Donald Thulean (1961-1962), Jacob Avshalomov (1962-1963), and Deborah Glaze (2001-2003).

In December 1947, PSC performed the *Genesis Suite*, a work by seven contemporary composers, with the reorganized Portland Symphony Orchestra, which had been inactive since 1938. It was the beginning of a productive collaboration that continues today (PSO became the Oregon Symphony Orchestra in 1967). PSC and PSO performed together in the Oregon centennial celebration at the state capitol in February 1959 and in a tribute to the slain President John F. Kennedy in December 1963.

In the summers of 1952 through 1955, PSC produced fifteen light operas in the Holladay Bowl, an outdoor project conceived by Zimmerman. The Bowl was constructed in a pit that had been excavated in the 1920s for a Lloyd Center luxury hotel that was never built. The amphitheater, which had a rotating stage, was constructed by volunteers in 1952. The Bowl now lies under the Lloyd Cinemas parking lot.

PSC has partnered with many performing organizations, including the Portland Chamber Orchestra, Portland Youth Philharmonic, Portland Opera, Salem Symphony, Portland State University ensembles, Portland ballet companies, Boston Pops, Dave Brubeck Quartet, and Cascade Festival Orchestra. PSC established the Symphonic Serenaders (1951-1974), a chamber choir, the Portland Symphonic Girlchoir (1989), and the Portland Boychoir (1994).

The choir has toured extensively, giving concerts in such places as Belgium, Germany, France, Estonia, Russia, Australia, and the Czech Republic. It has premiered works by Richard Moffatt (1959), Tomas Svoboda (1976), Tibor Serly (1978), Salvador Brotons (1994), Steven Paulus (1999), Bryan Johanson (1996, 2000, 2005), and Judith Lang Zaimont (2007). Notable recordings are the Victoria *Mass for Four Voices* (1958, RCA Victor) and the Johanson *Lux Aeterna* (2007, PSC).

Written by Thomas M. Hard

Further Reading:

Goodrich, Hollis. "Portland's symphonic choir, vocal cross section of a city." The *Oregonian*, 3/23/1947, magazine p. 2.

Lampman, Linda. "Portland Symphonic Choir, unique civic vocal group." *The Oregonian*, 10/30/1960, p. 43.

McCall, Lawson. "Rich man, poor man -- both can sing; and sing they do in symphonic choir, unique Portland music

organization." *The Oregonian*, 05/15/1949, magazine p. 2.

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