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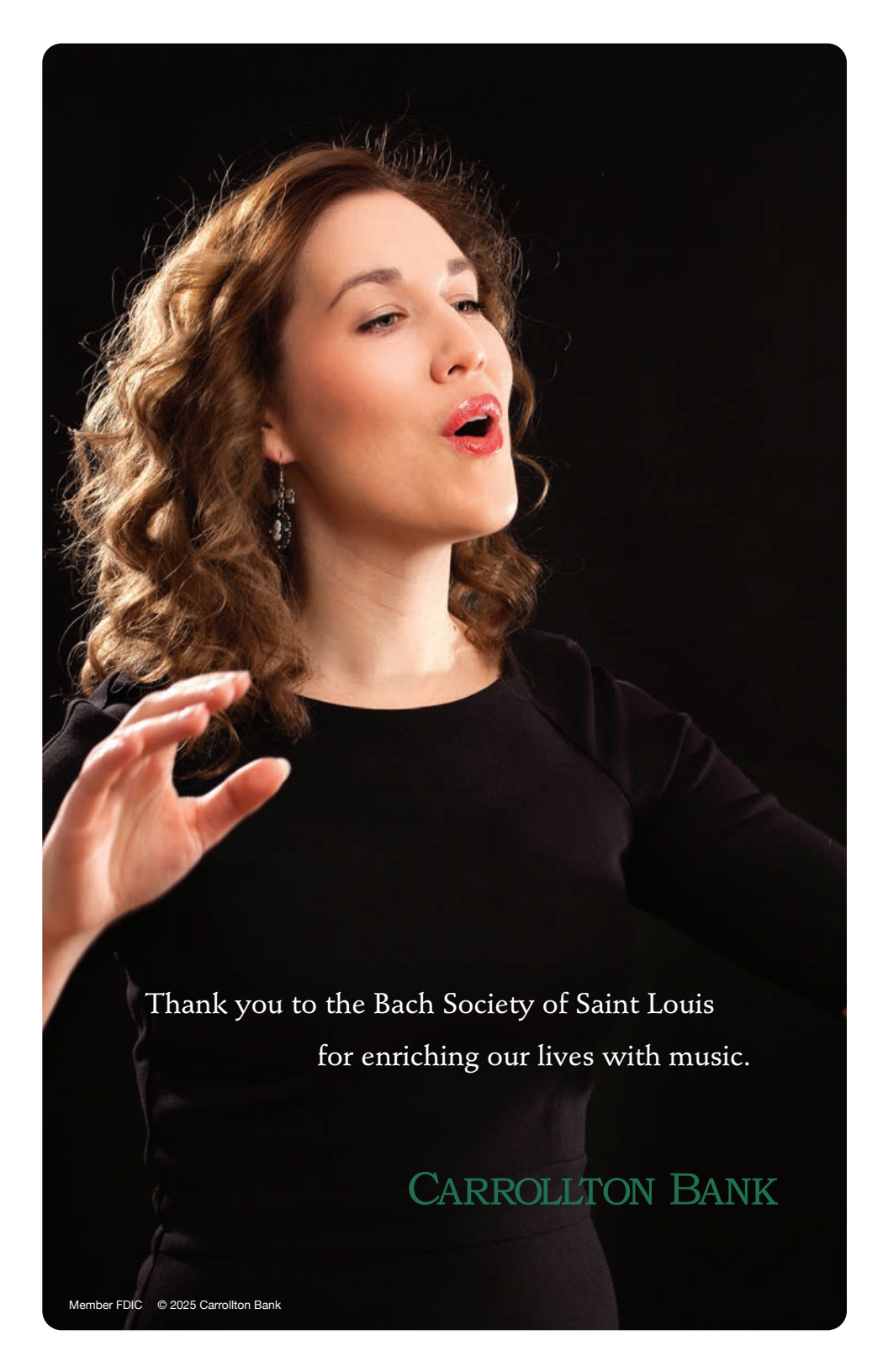
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A. Dennis Sparger, Music Director and Conductor



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## A. DENNIS SPARGER, MUSIC DIRECTOR & CONDUCTOR

**A. Dennis Sparger**, Music Director and Conductor, was critically acclaimed as “a conductor equipped with insight as well as craftsmanship” already in his second season. In the past four decades, he has received even more praise for his musical leadership with The Bach Society Chorus and Orchestra. To date, he has conducted them in more than 200 performances of major works by Bach and other composers.

Under his leadership, The Bach Society was presented with the Excellence in the Arts award by the Arts & Education Council of Greater St. Louis, the first chorus to be so honored. Dr. Sparger's leadership was also a driving force in the Christmas Candlelight Concerts being hailed by BBC Music magazine as “one of the top 20 live Christmas events in North America.”

In 1989, he introduced a Young Artists scholarship program for singers under 30 to cultivate future soloists. To date, over 70 young singers have been assisted by this program. He also established a professional core of paid Principal Singers, providing employment opportunities for singers with additional vocal training.

He was awarded a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in choral conducting by the University of Illinois and earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Eastern Illinois University, where he was named one of the 50 Outstanding Graduate Alumni of the Graduate School. In 2013, in recognition of his work with The Bach Society, he was presented with the Lifetime Achievement award by the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Dr. Sparger has also received awards from St. Louis Cathedral Concerts, the St. Louis chapter of the American Guild of Organists and the Illinois chapter of the American Choral Directors Association.

Dr. Sparger is a member of the American Bach Society, American Choral Directors Association, Chorus America, the National Society of Arts & Letters, and is a past board member of Artist Presentation Society.



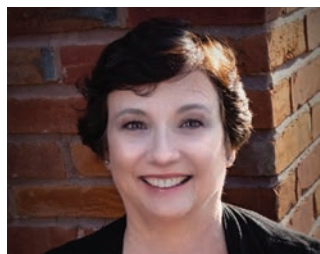
## STEPHEN EROS, ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR

**Stephen Eros** is a conductor, organist, pianist, and teacher who has built a career in the St. Louis area encompassing the traditions of Western classical, American musical theatre, and jazz music. Stephen completed a Master of Arts in Choral Conducting and Bachelor of Music in Organ Performance at Webster University. In addition to his primary studies with William Partridge and Trent Patterson, he studied voice with Robert Ayllón, jazz piano with Carolbeth True, and collaborative piano with Joe Neske.

Stephen has been the Assistant Conductor of The Bach Society of Saint Louis since 2013, and he has worked in the field of sacred music for nearly two decades. He is the Director of Liturgy and Music at St. Clare of Assisi Catholic Church in O'Fallon, IL. There, he is responsible for the formation and training of over 400 volunteers, and he leads nearly 100 volunteer singers in the parish choir and two children's choirs in a robust, diverse repertoire. On the diocesan level, he has served as organist and choirmaster for pontifical liturgies at the Cathedral of St. Peter in Belleville and regularly assists the Chancery and Office of Worship with liturgies throughout the diocese.

As a collaborative pianist, he has worked with some of the finest companies in St. Louis, including The Muny, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis and Union Avenue Opera, and serves on the collaborative piano faculty at Webster University.

Stephen is a lifelong resident of Belleville, IL. He resides with his wife and children in his grandparents' former home, next door to his favorite neighbors, his parents.



## GAIL HINTZ, PIANIST

**Gail Hintz** holds a Bachelor of Music degree in piano performance from Webster College, a Master of Music degree in vocal accompaniment and coaching from the University of Illinois, and spent a year in Paris studying piano at The Ecole Normale de Musique. She worked as a vocal coach/accompanist in New York City for several years, coaching singers, accompanying in voice teachers' studios and serving as music director/pianist for various regional opera and musical theatre companies and tours. Gail co-founded the Ozark Actors Theatre in her hometown of Rolla, MO, in 1987, and moved back to St. Louis in 1989. She coaches singers privately, accompanies recitals and auditions, manages and accompanies rehearsals for the St. Louis Symphony Chorus, and enjoys freelance work with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, St. Joseph Academy and other schools and arts organizations in St. Louis. Gail is honored to serve as interim accompanist for The Bach Society of Saint Louis this season.

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Our concerts are professionally recorded, please do your best to minimize excess noise. You will know it's time to applaud when the conductor lowers their arms after the final chord of a piece. This may not happen after every piece. Some songs are grouped together to create an emotional experience.

Thank you and enjoy the concert.

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A. DENNIS SPARGER, MUSIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR

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**GUEST ARTIST**

EMILY BIRSAN

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2025

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*BBC MUSIC Magazine*

# PROGRAM

**Welcome**

Melissa Payton, *Executive Director*

**O Come, O Come, Emmanuel**

Taylor Scott Davis

**Magnificat**

Sir John Rutter

*Please hold applause until the conclusion.*

**Emily Birsan, Soprano**

**1. Magnificat anima mea Dominum**

My soul magnifies the Lord:  
and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour.  
For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden:  
for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

**2. Of a Rose, a lovely Rose, of a Rose is all my song.**

Hearken to me, both old and young,  
How this Rose began to spring;  
A fairer rose to mine liking  
In all this world ne know I none.

Five branches of that rose there been,  
The which be both fair and sheen;  
The rose is called Mary, heaven's queen.  
Out of her bosom a blossom sprang.

The first branch was of great honour:  
That blest Marie should bear the flow'r;  
There came an angel from heaven's tower  
To break the devil's bond.

The second branch was great of might,  
That sprang upon Christmas night;  
The star shone over Bethlem bright,  
That man should see it both day and night.

The third branch did spring and spread;  
Three kinges then the branch gan led  
Unto Our Lady in her child-bed;  
Into Bethlem that branch sprang right.

The fourth branch it sprang to hell,  
The devil's power for to fell:  
That no soul therein should dwell,  
The branch so blessedfully sprang.

The fifth branch it was so sweet,  
It sprang to heav'n, both crop and root,  
Therein to dwell and be our \*bote:  
So blessedly it sprang.

*\*bote=salvation*

Pray we to her with great honour,  
She that bare the blessed flow'r,  
To be our help and our succour,  
And shield us from the fiendes bond.

*15th-century English*

### 3. **Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est**

For He who is mighty has done great things to me:  
and holy is His Name.

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts.

Heaven and earth are filled with Thy glory. Hosanna in the highest.

### 4. **Et misericordia eius**

And His mercy is on them who fear Him from generation to generation.

### 5. **Fecit potentiam in brachio suo**

He has shown strength with His arm:

He has scattered the proud, even the arrogant of heart.

He has deposed the mighty from their seats,  
and exalted the humble.

### 6. **Esurientes implevit bonis**

The hungry He has filled with good things:  
and the rich He has sent empty away.

He has helped His servant Israel.  
in remembrance of His mercy.

As it was spoken to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed for ever.

### 7. **Gloria Patri**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

*O holy Mary, help, we pray, all in need:*

*strengthen those whose spirit fails,*

*comfort those whom grief assails;*

*pray for thy people here, for thy Holy Church so dear;*

*intercede for all thy servants, Mother of all women:*

*grant us all the favour of thy gracious help;*

*succour us, comfort us, we humbly implore thee.*

*Alleluia.\**

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

*Translation by Ron Jeffers*

*\*Antiphon at Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

## INTERMISSION

### Silence to Joy, Candlelight Procession

A. Dennis Sparger & Ron Klemm

Let all mortal flesh keep silence  
O little town of Bethlehem  
It came upon a midnight clear  
Break forth, O beauteous heav'nly light (harm. J.S. Bach)  
Angels from the Realms of Glory

### The Three Kings

Healey Willan

'Who knocks tonight so late?' The weary porter said.  
Three Kings stood at the gate, Each with a crown on head.  
The serving man bowed down; The inn was full, he knew.  
Said he, 'In all this town is no fit place for you!'  
A light the manger lit: There lay the Mother meek.  
Said they, 'This place is fit: Here is the rest we seek!  
They loosed their latchet strings, So stood they all unshod.  
Come in, come in, ye Kings! And kiss the Feet of God.

*Laurence Housman*

### AUDIENCE CAROL

Ron Klemm, Bach Talk Producer

*The audience is invited to stand and join in singing.*

### O Come, All Ye Faithful

arr. Sir David Willcocks

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem,  
Come and behold him born the King of Angels;  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation.  
Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above;  
Glory to God in the highest:  
O come, let us adore Him, . . .

Yea, Lord we greet Thee, born this happy morning,  
Jesus, to Thee be glory giv'n;  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:  
O come, let us adore Him, . . .

**Stephen Eros, Assistant Conductor**

### Away in a Manger

Mack Wilberg

### Joy to the World

Taylor Scott Davis

**Emily Birsan, Soprano**

We praise Thee. We bless Thee.  
We worship Thee. We glorify Thee.

**Angels We Have Heard on High**

Barlow Bradford

**AUDIENCE CAROL**

*The audience is invited to stand and join in singing.*

**Hark, the Herald Angels Sing**

arr. Sir David Willcocks

Hark, the herald angels sing glory to the newborn King;  
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled:  
Joyful all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies,  
With th' angelic host proclaim, Christ is born in Bethlehem.  
Hark! the herald angels sing glory to the newborn King.

Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,  
Late in time behold Him come off-spring of a virgin's womb:  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail th'incarnate Deity!  
Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.  
Hark! the herald angels sing glory to the newborn King.

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Son of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings, ris'n with healing in His wings;  
Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die,  
Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.  
Hark! the herald angels sing glory to the newborn King.

**A Musicological Journey through the 12 Days of Christmas**

Craig Courtney

1. A Partridge from 6th-century Rome
2. Two Turtle Doves from 15th-century France
3. Three French Hens from 16th-century Italy
4. Four Calling Birds from 17th-century Italy
5. Five Gold Rings from 18th-century Germany
6. Six Geese a-Laying from 18th-century Austria
7. Seven Swans a-Swimming from 19th-century France
8. Eight Maids a-Milking from 19th-century Germany
9. Nine Ladies Dancing from 19th-century Austria
10. Ten Lords a-Leaping from 19th-century Italy
11. Eleven Pipers Piping from 19th-century Russia
12. Twelve Drummers Drumming from 19th-century USA

***May the peace and joy of Christmas be with you this day and throughout the New Year.***

# PROGRAM NOTES

**Sir John Rutter**, born in Cambridge, England, in 1945, is the son of an organic chemist and an aspiring actress. While he spent much of his youth as a solitary child, an old upright piano left in the family's apartment by a previous tenant provided him the opportunity to immerse himself in music for hours at a time. Lacking the formal training of scales and arpeggios, Rutter improvised melodies he found pleasing, forming the basis of a style that would later serve him well. In fact, it is his infectious melodies, along with colorful harmonies and brilliant orchestrations, that have made Rutter a favorite in churches, schools and concert halls around the world.

Rutter's musical education began as a chorister at Highgate School. During those years, he attended an evensong in King's Chapel that he recalled "made a deep impression." He continued his training at Clare College, where he composed one of his most successful carols, "The Shepherd's Pipe Carol," at the age of eighteen. At Clare, Rutter studied harmony and counterpoint under Sir David Willcocks, who recognized his gift, and arranged for his carols to be published by Oxford University Press. Soon, his fresh and colorful settings of both traditional and newly composed carols began to captivate English audiences and singers alike. It is by no accident that Rutter has devoted so much of his talent to the music of Christmas:

*"For me, first and foremost, Christmas is happy memories of the way it was celebrated when I was a kid . . . With music, your Christmas can always be perfect."*

In 1975, Rutter was appointed Director of Music at Clare College and began recording his music with the Clare College Choir. Following the overwhelming popularity of his *Gloria*, he left this position in 1979 to fulfill the increasing number of commissions. But within a few years, he realized that he missed leading a chorus, so he formed the Cambridge Singers, a group now widely known for its performances of Rutter's music. In 1983, he formed his own label, Collegium, to produce recordings by the Cambridge Singers and other fine choirs. An astute businessman as well as a prolific composer, Rutter sells between 50,000 and 100,000 CDs worldwide each year.

While widely known for his multitude of carols and anthems, Rutter has also written larger works for chorus, including *Gloria* (1974), *Requiem* (1985), *Magnificat* (1990), *Psalmfest* (1993) and *Mass of the Children* (2003). Orchestral and instrumental works include a piano concerto, two children's operas, music for television, and organ music. He was honored in 2024 with a knighthood in service to music.

**The *Magnificat***, composed in 1990, is based on the Gospel of St. Luke, l: 46-55, which tells of Mary's joy on learning that she was chosen to give birth to Jesus. The first movement, "My soul magnifies the Lord: and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour," sparkles with the excitement of receiving this news, with all the innocence of youth.

The composer then inserts a 15th-century poem that reflects on the five branches of the rose: Mary, the Star, the Three Kings, the destruction of the devil's power, and our *bote*, or salvation. The music alternates between a haunting refrain and verses reminiscent of chant. The third movement returns to the *Magnificat* text, utilizing the powerful brass and percussion to underscore "the might" of God. This is then contrasted and balanced by a delicate praise of God's holy name.

The fourth movement features a beautiful melody for soprano solo to express the mercy of God. The expression is so personal that, with a different text, this easily could have been an intimate love song. The next movement begins with low voices and dark colors to emphasize the proud and mighty whom God will cast down from their seats of power. What follows are brighter colors and transparent textures to accompany the exaltation of the humble and meek.

Movement 6 is a musical complement to 4, again featuring a soprano solo singing a melody of introspection, but this one to reflect on filling the hungry with God's nourishment and blessings. Finally, a fanfare reminiscent of the composer's *Gloria* announces the Gloria Patri. Then, after an unexpected chant by the soloist as a final prayer to Mary, the music returns to the opening pages for "as it was in the beginning", paying homage to the thrilling *Magnificat* setting by Johann Sebastian Bach.

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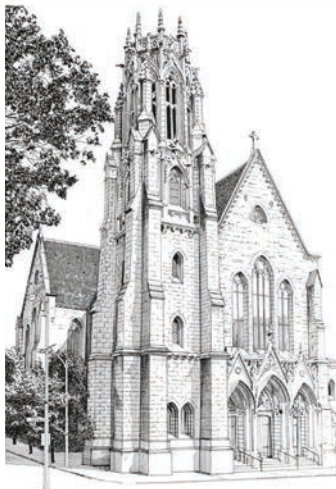


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# GUEST ARTIST

## EMILY BIRSAN SOPRANO



Emily Birsan is an American lyric soprano known for her radiant tone, nuanced artistry, and wide-ranging repertoire. Trained at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (MM) and Lawrence Conservatory (BM), Birsan has appeared with major opera companies including Lyric Opera of Chicago, Boston Lyric Opera, Welsh National Opera, and Madison Opera, and has been featured at the Edinburgh International Festival, Carnegie Hall, Ravinia, Grant Park, and with orchestras across the U.S. and abroad. In recent seasons, Emily has sung the roles of Eurydice in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Eurydice* and Asteria in Handel's *Tamerlano*.

In the 2025–2026 season, Birsan is thrilled to return to The Bach Society of Saint Louis. She appeared as Speranza Celeste in Stradella's *Ester* with Haymarket Opera Company in Chicago, performed as soprano soloist in Brahms's *Ein Deutsches Requiem* with Apollo Chorus, *Carmina Burana* with Northwest Symphony Orchestra, and Poulenc's *Gloria* with Lacrosse Symphony. In addition, Birsan will return to Madison Opera to sing in Scott Gendel's new opera *Everlasting Faint* this Spring.

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Samantha Arten  
Pamela Cajka  
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Julia Dinkins  
Kay Guebert  
Rachel Jones  
Josie Kopff  
Ellen Leaf  
Karen Lohrman  
Debbie Mann  
Gabrielle Pierle  
Rita Schien\*

## **SOPRANO II**

Laura Hanson  
Jesi Hempstead  
Heather Martin Cooper  
Susan Niederer  
Melissa Payton  
Sarah Sheldon  
Emma Wittenauer

## **ALTO I**

Mary Kate File  
Carin Gado-Recks  
Calista Goldwasser\*  
Christa Hellert-Musick  
Maggie Lowe  
Stephanie McSwain  
Alison Neace  
Molly Stehn  
Shephali Wulff

## **ALTO II**

Kelly N. Beekman\*  
Melody Bellora Edmondson  
Jamie Lynn Eros  
Danielle Feinstein  
Marissa Gibbons  
Nancy Greene  
Emily Henriksen  
Hana Hiromitsu

## **TENOR I**

Nathan Crowder  
Kurtis Heinrich  
Will Kinsella  
Avi Mazzeo  
Robert Miller  
Kevin Neace\*  
Darrell Steinbach

## **TENOR II**

Seth Carruthers  
Peter Hensel  
Jacob Hinton  
Scott Meidroth  
Duane L. Olson  
Zachary Singer  
Peter Sykes

## **BASS I**

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Stephen A. Eros  
Greg Finch  
Warren Fryeton  
Adrian Mason  
Matt McEuen  
Jack McFarling  
Dominic Pancella

## **BASS II**

Nicholas D. Bashaw  
David T. Cox  
James Haessig  
Kersten Horn  
Shawn Neace  
Allen Schwamb  
Gary Voelker

Pianist: Gail Hintz

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\* indicates 2025-2026 Young Artist Award Recipient

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Joseph Kaminsky  
Hannah Frey  
John Brighton  
Deberah Haferkamp  
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Jonathan Crosmer  
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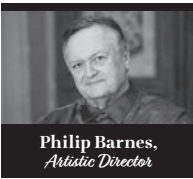
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May 31, 2026 | 3pm

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# YOUNG ARTISTS

## KELLY N. BEEKMAN MEZZO SOPRANO



**Kelly N. Beekman**, mezzo-soprano, is honored to have been chosen by The Bach Society of Saint Louis to represent their Young Artist program for her third consecutive season. She is a classically trained local artist who specializes in multiple genres. She graduated from Webster University with a Bachelor of Arts in Music, focusing on training her voice in both operatic and contemporary singing styles. While at Webster, she was a recipient of the Christine Brewer Annual Scholarship in Vocal Music Performance and she received departmental honors for her tireless dedication to her craft and her outstanding performances. She has had the privilege to represent

other local music organizations such as Union Avenue Opera (*Eugene Onegin*, 2022 and *Carmen*, 2024; Chorus) and Winter Opera St. Louis (*Manon Lescaut*, *Naughty Marietta*, 2024 and *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *Anna Bolena*, 2025; Chorus). She is a founding member of Magpie Opera Collective, a local arts organization dedicated to providing opportunities and performance experience to early-career classical vocalists. Outside of the classical realm, Kelly is a backup singer for the local funk-rock band Eldraco and the Free Nation and she writes and records her own contemporary music.

## CALISTA GOLDWASSER MEZZO SOPRANO



**Calista Goldwasser**, mezzo-soprano, returns to The Bach Society of Saint Louis as a Young Artist for a second season. She holds a Master of Music from Webster University and a Bachelor of Music from DePauw University. Calista regularly sings in the opera chorus of Winter Opera St. Louis and Union Avenue Opera. This year, you can find her in the chorus of *The Sorcerer* and *Roméo et Juliette* with Winter Opera. In addition to working with these organizations, Calista also founded the Magpie Opera Collective along with her operatic colleagues to create more opportunities for early-career operatic voices in the St. Louis area. In addition to performing, Calista

teaches voice lessons with Patterson Performing Arts and is the primary instructor for The Bach Society's own "Finding Your Voice" outreach program. Calista looks forward to strengthening her relationship with The Bach Society both as a Young Artist and educator.

# YOUNG ARTISTS

## KEVIN NEACE TENOR



**Kevin Neace**, tenor, is thrilled to return to The Bach Society of Saint Louis as a Young Artist. He holds a Bachelor of Music from Wheaton College and a Master of Music from the University of Memphis. While pursuing his degrees, he performed with numerous professional ensembles, including the Rhodes Mastersingers and the Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh and served as a cantor for St. John Lutheran and St. Louis Catholic churches. Kevin made his professional debut in Union Avenue Opera's *Aida* and has previously performed in the University of Memphis productions of *Don Giovanni*, *The Cousin From Nowhere* and *Trouble In Tahiti*, where he received praise for his navigation of operatic and jazz vocal stylings as well as his impeccable comedic timing. An Alton native and a lifelong Bach Society fan, Kevin presently performs with the Magpie Opera Collective and The Cathedral Basilica's Schola Cantorum and looks forward to growing as a musician with The Bach Society.

## RITA SCHIEN SOPRANO



**Rita Schien**, soprano, is thrilled to return for another season as a Young Artist with The Bach Society of Saint Louis. She earned her Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of Missouri–St. Louis, where she studied with Dr. Leslie Allnatt and was awarded the Presser Scholarship in 2024. Her performance credits include Winter Opera St. Louis (*The Magic Flute*, *The Sorcerer*, *Un Ballo in Maschera*), Magpie Opera Collective, Union Avenue Opera, the St. Louis Women's Chorale and The Recruits Chorus. In addition to her performing career, she serves as the Enrollment & Production Manager for The St. Louis Children's Choirs. She is thankful for the opportunities The Bach Society has provided to further her musical growth.

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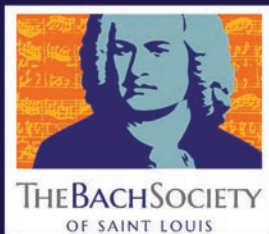
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October 5	Solemn Choral Evensong*
October 19	Choral Evensong
November 2	Solemn Choral Evensong for The Solemnity of All Saints*
November 6   6:30 PM	Solemn Choral Evensong (The Living Church Conference)*
November 16	Choral Evensong
December 7	Candlelight Advent Lessons and Carols
December 21	A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols (Prelude music begins at 4:40 PM)
January 4	Choral Evensong for The Epiphany
January 18	Choral Evensong
February 1	Choral Evensong
February 15	Choral Evensong
March 1	Lenten Choral Evensong at Saint Louis Abbey
March 15	Solemn Lenten Choral Evensong*
March 29	Solemn Choral Evensong for Palm Sunday*
April 19	Choral Evensong for Eastertide
May 3	Eastertide Vespers sung by the monks of Saint Louis Abbey
May 17	Choral Evensong for Eastertide
June 7	Solemn Choral Evensong for Corpus Christi*

\*Hypo-allergenic incense will be used.

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—❧—❧—❧—❧—❧—

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