

Quire Cleveland bids adieu to its founders with free retrospective concert at St. John's

by Daniel Hathaway



The professional singers of Quire Cleveland will end their 10th anniversary season this Saturday evening May 26 at 7:30 pm, with a free concert at St. John's Cathedral featuring favorite pieces from the ensemble's repertoire. The event will also mark the retirement of Quire's founders, Ross W. Duffin and Beverly Simmons, who plan

to take up residence both in California and Washington D.C. to be close to their children and grandchildren.

Duffin and Simmons have been catalysts for early music in Cleveland since Duffin's arrival at Case Western Reserve University in 1978. Among other activities, they produced the Chapel, Court and Countryside concert series at CWRU, and Duffin hosted the National Public Radio program *Micrologos: Exploring the World of Early Music*. Under his tutelage, a constant stream of early music specialists has emerged from Case over the decades, and Duffin was named Distinguished University Professor last year.



Crowning their achievements, on May 23, Early Music America named Duffin and Simmons as the recipients of the 2018 Howard Mayer Brown Award for lifetime achievement in the field of early music.

During its first decade, Quire Cleveland has collaborated with Cleveland Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra, CityMusic Cleveland, and Les Délices, but its central repertoire is nine centuries worth of *a cappella* music. In addition to its themed programs, some of which have been led by guest conductors Timothy Brown, David Fallis, Jameson Marvin, and Scott Metcalfe, Quire has presented an annual December program of “Carols for Quire,” featuring music from the old and new worlds.

How did Duffin arrive at Saturday’s program? “I chose our favorite pieces from different programs we’ve sung over the last decade,” he said in a telephone conversation. “Mainly works from our Byrd, Purcell, Monteverdi, and Flower of Flanders programs — pieces that have given a great deal of pleasure to me, the singers, and to our audience. Those remain in your memory as being special, so it was easy to come up with a list of such pieces for the concert.”

The program moves from Europe to the U.S., and ends up in Canada and England with Healey Willan’s *Rise up, my love*, William H. Harris’ *Bring us, O Lord God*, and Peter Warlock’s *Benedicamus Domino*. “We did the Willan with David Fallis from Toronto,” Duffin said, himself a native of Ontario. “We sang the Harris with Tim Brown from Clare College, Cambridge, and the words ‘Benedicamus Domino’ dismiss the congregation at the end of Mass — it’s a nice way to end the program.”



Duffin has invited his successor, Jay White (above, left), to conduct the Willan as a way of introducing Quire’s new conductor to the audience. “Jay has been with us since 2011 and has extensive experience singing with Chanticleer in hundreds of

performances throughout the world. He's a fine musician and singer, and knows a lot of repertoire," Duffin said.

While White will be picking up Duffin's artistic duties, soprano Elena Mullins (above, right), Quire's new executive director, will be moving into the big shoes left behind by Beverly Simmons. "I'm thrilled, although I've never done anything of quite this magnitude," Mullins said in a telephone conversation, adding that she had acquired some management experience as a founding member of two medieval ensembles. "I joined Quire in 2011, but as a singer, I never saw all the incredible work Ross and Bev put in behind the scenes. I would be a lot more nervous if I hadn't been meeting regularly with the board — there are a lot of really great people involved."

Duffin noted that Quire's board members are experiencing renewed vigor in the process of dealing with transition plans. "They've realized they need to make a team effort to take over Bev's responsibilities, which are as essential to the group as what I've been doing," Duffin said. "And Elena has a long history with the group. She's tremendously smart and talented, and she's going to do a great job."



Duffin and Simmons are leaving Quire in good hands and with fine memories. "It's been really wonderful," Duffin said. "Bev and I both think that choral music is the best kind of music, with so much gorgeous repertoire over so many centuries. We've enjoyed sharing it with the community."

Ross Duffin and Beverly Simmons are leaving the doors wide open to future activities beyond enjoying their children and grandchildren. Simmons said, “I’ll be excited to see what fills up my time, but I don’t know yet what that will be.” Duffin does have some specific research in mind once he escapes the daily routines of academia. “I’ll make use of the proximity of the Folger and Huntington libraries to pursue some scholarly projects with as much enthusiasm as ever, but at a slightly more languorous pace,” he said. “No meetings, no teaching, no grading, no report writing — it’s going to be wonderful.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com May 24, 2018.

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