

**Quire Cleveland: fifteen minutes
with new conductor Jay White**

by Daniel Hathaway



Conductor Jay White is leading Quire Cleveland into its second decade this season following the retirement of the professional choir's founders, Ross W. Duffin and Beverly Simmons. His debut program at St. John's Cathedral in downtown Cleveland on Friday, November 2 at 7:30 pm is a complex web of music celebrating All Saints and All Souls Days.

White, who toured as a countertenor for eight seasons with Chanticleer, and now serves as professor of voice at Kent State, has put together a program that interleaves Gregorian chants of the Requiem Mass with mass movements by several different Renaissance composers, and memorial motets written in honor of Machaut, Ockeghem, Josquin, and Tallis. The concert will be repeated on Saturday, November 3 at 7:30 pm at St. Sebastian Church in Akron.

In a telephone conversation from his office at the University, White noted that his long experience as a professional vocalist gave him a lot of repertory to choose from. "I took an Ockeghem motet that Chanticleer had interleaved with motets as a template. Then I did a little more sleuthing and it was great to find how many composers had written elegies or *deplorations* as tributes to their mentors that could be included. Then my sidekick John McElliott thought it would be interesting to include pieces by Charles H. H. Parry and William H. Harris at the end, giving a sense of expansion both through the use of double choir and harmony that's much grander than the early stuff. So we'll begin this program with duets, trios, and quartets, adding more voices as the repertoire gets later and later, and ending with our full force of 28 singers."

White will yield the podium to Montreal-based conductor Eric Milnes for Quire's Christmas collaborations with Les Délices — plans that were already in the works before Quire's new director was chosen. "Quire will provide the soloists and chorus for Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *Midnight Mass*, and both Quire and Les Délices will perform separate vocal and instrumental versions of the French *Noëls* on which the Mass is based."

That program will travel among three locations: Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Akron on December 21, Lakewood Congregational Church on December 22, and Our Lady of Peace Church in Cleveland on December 23.

White is still assembling Quire's May programs, to be presented on May 4 at 7:30 pm in Lakewood Congregational Church, and May 5 at 4:00 pm at Historic St. Peter's Church in downtown Cleveland. "I wanted to get feedback from the singers first about what they thought they excelled in. The answer was Elizabethan music. I also wanted to be sure who was returning to the ensemble. Fortunately, a large majority of previous singers chose to return, but I wanted to create a sound with them during the initial concerts before making a final decision about the third program."



Rather than re-auditioning the entire membership, White chose to hold a couple of open rehearsals combining former singers with interested newcomers. "We'll be using different personnel in different concerts," he said. "I'm hoping that program-specific curating is what we'll do in the future rather than always performing with a fixed group. We know what our strengths are, and my goal is to highlight those strengths."

We spoke before Quire's first rehearsal, which was scheduled for the Monday before the opening concert. "We're planning to have four rehearsals. Ross had five. I'm curious to see how well the ensemble comes together in a limited time. There's a fiscal perspective to that, and although I was told by my board president not to worry about it, that's not who I am," White said.

White plans to spend the first rehearsal working through the first half of the weekend's program that involves smaller ensembles. "Typically, we'll sing through a piece to see where we are, then after a little woodshedding — working on words if those are a problem — we'll give it a second reading and work on musical phrases. I plan to put a lot of responsibility on the singers themselves. I look on them as a Ferrari, or whatever well-designed sports car you want to imagine. I don't want to drive it, I want to be a passenger. There's great value in that car, and years and years of development. I want to go on a ride with them, with the singers taking responsibility for being the musicians I know they are. When I get goosebumps, I'll know there's something right. I can't wait to hear them. I'm really very excited."

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