

# San Francisco Girls Chorus

LISA BIELAWA | ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

VALÉRIE SAINTE-AGATHE | MUSIC DIRECTOR AND PRINCIPAL CONDUCTOR



37<sup>th</sup> Season Report

ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THE 2015-16 FISCAL YEAR

## 37th CONCERT SEASON

### Surprising Freedoms

Acclaimed New York early music ensemble TENET joined us for the season opening concert of music composed by and for women in Italian monasteries in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that reveal a different view of the cloistered life during the Baroque era. Separated from many worldly indulgences, women in monasteries were often able to pursue active careers and acclaim by perfecting the creation of music and literature, resulting in masterworks of stunning and rarely heard beauty.

### An American Christmas

This concert featured beloved Christmas carols, all composed in the United States of America. The full complement of more than 350 voices of the SF Girls Chorus and SF Girls Chorus School, from ages 7 to 18, were lifted in celebration of the holiday season—American style—with superstar soprano Deborah Voigt. From colonial times, America shaped its own brand of holiday celebration, fusing cultural traditions and forging new ones.

### Echoes of the Classics: Canons by Brahms, Franck and Haydn

Described by the San Francisco Chronicle as, "A cellist of extraordinary technical and musical gifts," Joshua Roman (2011 TED Fellow) joined the SF Girls Chorus and singers from the SF Girls Chorus School in this program showing how great composers elevated canons and rounds to high art. This concert also premiered a piece composed for the Chorus by Joshua Roman.

### Luminous Premieres

Our season-closing concert featured premieres created expressly for the SF Girls Chorus by an engaging and diverse group of gifted American composers, including Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Aaron Jay Kernis; contemporary bard Gabriel Kahane, and Theo Bleckmann, a Munich-born jazz vocalist and composer whose work is playful yet sophisticated. Completing the program was another premiere by SFGC Artistic Director Lisa Bielawa, plus a piece by composer-pianist Timo Andres, who created a meditation on comfort foods, inspired by a list of them from friends.

## 37TH SEASON PERFORMANCE PARTNERS

San Francisco Girls Chorus thanks our Performance Partners, donors whose generosity and partnership made a powerful statement in support of our artistic vision for our 37th Anniversary

Season:

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Music Director Valérie Sainte-Agathe and members of SFGC with Deborah Voigt at Davies Symphony Hall, December



SFGC, conducted by Valérie Sainte-Agathe, in concert with TENET early music ensemble, October 2015

## ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

### With the San Francisco Opera

Members of the SFGC Chorus School collaborated with the San Francisco Opera in a production of Bizet's *Carmen*, which ran from May 27 to July 3, 2016 at the War Memorial Opera House. This was a co-production with Boston Lyric Opera based on Boito's production which originated at El Festival de Peralada in Catalonia, and Opera Zuid in the Netherlands.

### With the San Francisco Symphony

Members of the SFGC Chorus School took part in a holiday program with the San Francisco Symphony, under the baton of Teddy Abrams, and featuring violinist Elena Urioste. The Davies Symphony Hall program—*A Classic Christmas*—featured some of the most celebrated winter pieces of all time. Violinist Elena Urioste—whose work the Washington Post characterizes as "...equal parts passion, sensuality, brains and humor"—joined for exhilarating performances of Vivaldi's "Winter" from *The Four Seasons*, and more.

### With New Century Chamber Orchestra

SFGC appeared as guest artists with Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg and the New Century Chamber Orchestra in holiday-themed concerts featuring works by internationally known klezmer clarinetist David Krakauer in a "Chrimukkah" holiday celebration.

### With Kronos Quartet

The SF Girls Chorus sang with Kronos Quartet in February 2016, at San Francisco Jazz, in a concert featuring Yet Aleksandra Vrebalov's "Bubbles" and Sahba Aminikia's "Sound, Only Sound Remains."

### With Contemporary Jewish Museum

Members of the newly formed School Honors Ensemble (SHE) performed at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, in conjunction with the Bill Graham Exhibition. Legendary rock concert promoter Bill Graham was a hidden child of the Holocaust, and in this concert presented in honor of Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day), SHE performed arrangements of some of Bill Graham's favorite songs to a sold-out audience. A small group of donors enjoyed a pre-concert reception with special guests.

### Vireo

In August 2015, SFGC traveled to Southern California to collaborate with mezzo-soprano Laurie Rubin, cellist Joshua Roman, harpist Bridget Kibbey and LA Philharmonic violinist Vijay Gupta, on Episode 4 of Artistic Director Lisa Bielawa's new serial video opera, *Vireo*, which will be broadcast on KCET in spring of 2017. In January 2015, SFGC traveled to LA again to collaborate with the *Vireo* team on Episode 5. SFGC soprano Emma MacKenzie was cast in a lead role and has done two more shoots in spring 2016, including one in LA with the Prism Saxophone Quartet and Partch LA, and on Alcatraz Island with the American Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME) and Capella SF.

## ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

### With the Oregon Shakespeare Company

In July 2015, SFGC traveled to Ashland, Oregon to sing for a week at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and the Britt Festival, the Pacific Northwest's premiere outdoor performing arts festival in Jacksonville, Oregon.

### Creating Choral Music

SFGC's in-school outreach program continued for the fourth year at Berkeley's Jefferson Elementary, providing choral music instruction to 60 second-graders, and 100 second-graders in its eighth year at Lafayette Elementary School in San Francisco. This year, the program expanded to include St. Martin de Porres School in Oakland where 60 K-2 graders received weekly instruction.



SFGC with Music Director and Principal Conductor Valérie Sainte-Agathe on set in Southern California for the taping of Artistic Director Lisa Bielawa's serial television broadcast opera, *Vireo*.

## 37<sup>TH</sup> SEASON GALA

SFGC's annual fundraising event was held at the elegant City Club of San Francisco in March, 2016. 130 guests attended the festive evening, which featured a performance by the Girls Chorus and mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade. The gala honored former Board Member and treasured SFGC supporter Lynne Carmichael, and featured remarks by Democratic House Leader Nancy Pelosi. The gala raised over \$120,000, including more than \$55,000 in support of SFGC's music education and need-based scholarship program.



The Girls Chorus with mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade, led by Music Director and Principal Conductor Valérie Sainte-Agathe



SFGC Chorus School Director Emeritus Beth Avakian with gala speaker and guest, Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi.



Alumna speaker Sarita Cannon (right) with her sister Marlena Cannon de Mendez, also an Alumna of the Chorus



SFGC Board Treasurer and Alumna Irma Delos Santos Laxamana and guests including Ray & Hinnie Chan, Michelle & Brian Vu, and Ross & Loredie Lugos.



Gala honoree and Committee Chair Lynne Carmichael and Sheila Schwartzburg, Board Development Committee Chair

## 2016 NEW YORK TOUR

The 46 singers of SFGC's premiere performance ensemble traveled to New York, NY in June, where they performed concerts as guest artists with the New York Philharmonic's Biennial Festival of New Music. While in New York, the Chorus also performed a concert at Trinity Church Wall



SF Girls Chorus conducted by Music Director and Principal Conductor Valérie Sainte-Agathe. *Upper left:* At the Statue of Liberty. *Upper right:* Onstage at Trinity Wall Street Church. *Bottom:* With The Knights Orchestra and Brooklyn Youth Chorus, appearing as part of the NY Philharmonic's Biennial Festival, at Lincoln Center.

## BON VOYAGE TO MELANIE SMITH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SFGC bid a fond farewell to Executive Director Melanie Smith this June. Serving for the past 10 years as Executive Director, she has brought the Chorus to new heights in professional, administrative, and educational achievement. The Board, Staff, and Choristers benefitted from her years of sound judgement and steady leadership. Melanie leaves to become President of San Francisco Performances. She succeeds Founder and President Ruth Felt as she retires after 36 years. Melanie is actually returning to San Francisco Performances, where she previously worked for nine years as the Director of Education and Artistic Administration, from 1997-2006. We wish Melanie the very best in this endeavor, and know that she will return to be with us frequently at concerts in the future! BON VOYAGE, MELANIE!!



SFGC Executive Director Melanie Smith with Lisa Bielawa, Leader Nancy Pelosi, and Valérie Sainte-Agathe at the 2016 Gala.



## ENROLLMENT AND FINANCIAL AID

### Demographics

During the 2015-16 season, enrollment in our core music education and performance programs exceeded 330 girls and young women, ages 5 through 18, from all nine Bay Area counties. The demographic makeup during the year was 4% African-American, 29% Asian, 44% Caucasian, 7% Hispanic, and 7% Mixed Race, with 9% reporting no ethnicity.

### Scholarship Program

Since our founding in 1978, SFGC has been committed to the principle that no girl should be prevented from Chorus participation because of her family's financial circumstances. During 2015-16, SFGC awarded a total of \$120,000 in financial assistance to 109 choristers. Of these, 60% received scholarships for half or more of their tuition or summer music camp fees, and 14% of all choristers received 100% financial aid.



Young choristers in rehearsal during Preparatory Camp at the Kanbar Center

## BUILDING

In the 2015-16 season, the SFGC undertook capital projects to repair and renovate several parts of the Kanbar Performing Arts Center. Steps were taken to rain-proof a mansard roof cornice which had been damaged in a storm. This repair was made possible by a grant from San Francisco's Voluntary Arts Contribution Fund. In addition, a renovation of the Kanbar Center's Chorissima Hall was completed in fall, 2015. Detailed woodwork received a thorough painting, old stained carpeting was replaced, and new lighting was installed – with beautiful results. SFGC undertook these capital projects to ensure the structural integrity of the building, and retain its attractiveness for its own use, and for the many arts organizations that hold concerts and gatherings within its walls.

A list of notable tenants for the 2015-16 fiscal year follows:

American Bach Soloists	French American International School	Resound
American Composers Forum	Jubilee	San Francisco Bay Area NATS
Capella SF	Kronos Quartet	San Francisco Boys Chorus
Chanticleer	Lieder Alive	SF Gay Mens Chorus
City Church SF	Mills College	SF Jazz
Clerestory	Musae	San Francisco Opera
Conspiracy of Beards	New Century Chamber Orchestra	San Francisco Opera Merola Program
Conspiracy of Venus	Opera Parallele	San Francisco Opera Works
Cypress String Quartet	Philharmonia Baroque	The Table
Fog City Singers	Ray of Light Theater	



SFGC rehearses in the newly renovated hall, with Music Director and Principal Conductor Valérie Sainte-Agathe and The Knights Orchestra Conductor Eric Jacobsen.

## MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

In November 2015, *San Francisco Classical Voice* applauded the collaboration between the San Francisco Girls Chorus and the esteemed New York- based early music ensemble, TENET. Their review of the October 30 concert asserted “San Francisco Girls Chorus is a vocal ensemble of immense flexibility with a sound that is both homogeneous and distinct. The girls’ voices blend beautifully, and the soloists and small ensembles from within the group are excellent. The chorus sang the entire program from memory, and there was neither a note out of place nor did the performance seem over-rehearsed.”

In February 2016, the San Francisco Girls Chorus performed at the renowned Kronos Festival and joined the Kronos Quartet on stage for Yet Aleksandra Vrebalov’s “Bubbles” and Sahba Aminikia’s “Sound, Only Sound Remains.” *The Wall Street Journal* hailed the chorus as “outstanding” and declared that it was “impossible not to be moved” by the girls' performance.

In April 2016, the SFGC concert with TENET was also covered by KDFC in their radio program “Bay Area Mix,” in a survey of up-and-coming young professional ensembles in the Bay Area.

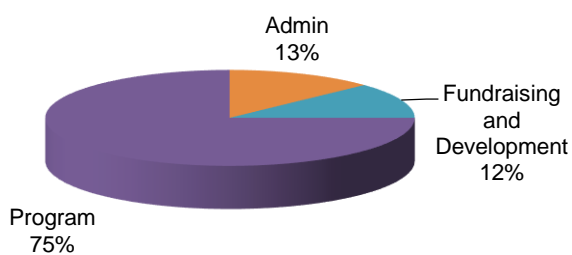
In June 2016, San Francisco Classical Voice called the SFGC’s performance at the Switchboard Music Festival “...mesmerizing and dramatic” and noted the style of Music Director and Principal Conductor Agathe-Smith as, “...graceful but dynamic...deploying fluid arms and hands...lovely to witness.”

Also in June 2016, The New Yorker’s critic Alex Ross called SFGC Artistic Director Lisa Bielawa's composition *My Outstretched Hand* a weaving of, “...variegated, at times voluptuous choral textures.”

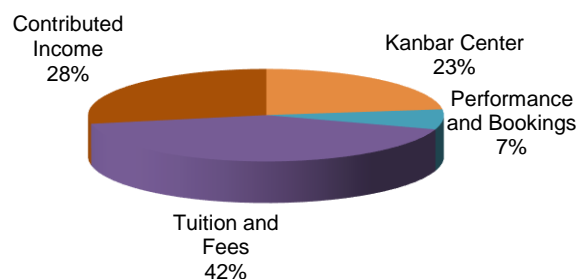
## ALLOCATION OF REVENUE & EXPENSES

SFGC remains a responsible and ethical nonprofit partner, maintaining the appropriate ratio of funds committed to programming, and keeping costs of administration and fundraising low.

**FY15-16 Expenses**



**FY15-16 Revenue**



## ELIZABETH AVAKIAN LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

As the founder of SFGC's Chorus School, Elizabeth Avakian has left an indelible mark on the Girls Chorus through her standards of excellence. Having served as Chorus School and Level IV Director for 32 years, her dedication to the Chorus as musician, teacher and mentor has created a legacy that will endure to inspire a whole new generation of young women. To honor her extraordinary contributions to this organization, San Francisco Girls Chorus recognizes **The Elizabeth Avakian Leadership Circle** for annual commitments of \$5,000 and above. SFGC gratefully acknowledges these 2015-16 members of the Elizabeth Avakian Leadership Circle, who were thanked at an open rehearsal on May 31, 2016. Repertoire at the open rehearsal included selections from pieces that were performed in the subsequent performance at Lincoln Center, as part of the New York Philharmonic's Biennial Festival of new music.

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