

Choral society introduces Peter Hopkins

The chorus' new music director begins his tenure with "Vaulted Arches: English Cathedral Music," Saturday at Christ Episcopal Church.

By Susan L. Peña
Reading Eagle Correspondent

The Reading Choral Society is starting its 2007-2008 season with a new music director. Peter Hopkins, after he was selected through an extensive search process at the end of last season. The first concert under his direction, "Vaulted Arches: English Cathedral Music," will feature music from the Renaissance through 20th-century composer Benjamin Britten. Saturday at 8 p.m. in Christ Episcopal Church at Fifth and Court streets.

While he didn't choose the themes for the season, this having been done prior to the departure of former music director David DeVenney, Hopkins

said in a recent interview that English cathedral music is one of his specialties.

"The Grand Rapids (Mich.) Choir of Men and Boys (which he directed in the past) did this exclusively," he said. "So this worked out for me. The Reading Choral Society hasn't done this before. It's good for a large group to have to sing like a chamber choir. ... It's something new and refreshing for the singers."

The season will continue with "It's a Grand Night for Singing: The Music of Rodgers and Hammerstein" on Friday, Jan. 25 at 8 p.m. and Sunday, Jan. 27 at 3 p.m. in the Wyndham Abraham Lincoln Presidential Ballroom, followed by Handel's "Utrecht Jubilate" and Haydn's "Lord Nelson Mass" on Sunday, April 20 at

4 p.m. in the Albright College Chapel.

Hopkins said the choral society's present format of having a smaller concert with no orchestra in the fall, a pops concert in January and a major work with orchestra in the spring is "a nice balance," and he plans to keep that format as he plans for the seasons to come.

Since 2003, Hopkins and his wife, organist Paula Pugh Romanoux (who will perform with the RCS during Saturday's concert), have shared the music ministry at St. Peter's Church, Third and Pine streets in Philadelphia. He conducts the adult and children's choirs and oversees the music ministry, and she plays the organ, although they can switch positions when necessary.

The ability to share the position and the fact that the church wanted to develop a large children's choir drew the couple from Grand Rapids, where Hop-



Peter Hopkins
new music director



Paula Pugh Romanoux
Hopkins' wife will perform

kings had been the director of the Grand Rapids Symphony Chorus and the Michigan Bach Collegium, in addition to the men's and boys' choir.

Born in Benzonia, Mich., a

If you go

Event: Reading Choral Society presents "Vaulted Arches: English Cathedral Music"

Where and when: Saturday at 8 p.m. in Christ Episcopal Church, Fifth and Court streets

Tickets: Call 610-898-1939 or Tickets at 610-796-9001

portant thing he learned from Rilling was that the whole process of rehearsing and performing choral works should be enjoyable for everyone.

"The rehearsal should be enjoyed, not just endured to get to the performance," he said. "The rehearsals are as important as the concert, because that's where you learn. It's essential with volunteers, but it's just as important with professionals. If you treat them well they'll make better music."

Hopkins and Romanoux met while teaching at Kalamazoo College, where he also served as conductor of the Kalamazoo Bach Festival. They married, then moved to Grand Rapids.

He said they have been delighted with living in the heart of South Philadelphia.

"It's like being in a small village," he said. "We can't go more than a block without running into people we know."

Working in the old Colonial area appeals to him as a history buff; he likes being able to sit in George Washington's pew box in St. Peter's Church.

He said he applied for the position of music director for RCS because, "I love my position, but one thing we can't do in St. Peter's because of a lack of space is choral/orchestral music. I've done that all through my career, and it's a big part of my life. I really miss it. ... This fills a void in my life."

He said his plans for future seasons include conducting both works he has conducted before and new ones he looks forward to exploring with the singers. He is also hoping to increase the size of the group, and encourages anyone who is interested in singing with them to attend a rehearsal any time and meet with him afterwards.

Rehearsals are held Tuesday evenings at 7:30 in Christ Episcopal Church. The Reading Choral Society office is located in the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts, and can be reached at 610-898-1939. The group also has a Web site at www.readingchoral.org.

Contact Susan L. Peña at entertainment@readingeagle.com.

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Reading Symphony Orchestra

Anka's career marks 50 years

By John Rogers
The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Paul Anka has written an inordinate

amount of pop music classics, cranking out hit songs like "My Way" for Frank Sinatra, "It Doesn't Matter Anymore" for Buddy Holly, saving "Lonely Boy," "Put Your Head on My Shoulder," "Puppy Love" and others for himself — not bad for a guy who arrived on the music scene in 1956 with a not-quite-as-catchy tune about a place called Blaauwildebeestfontein.

Anka, who's marking his 50th year in show business, actually tried to break into the business 51 years ago.

"A lot of people don't know I came to L.A. the prior year to visit an uncle," the 66-year-old Canadian-born singer-songwriter recalled recently as he was putting the finishing touches on his anniversary album, the just-released "Classic Songs My Way."

Still a high school student, Anka had brought with him the book "Prestor John" (required reading for Canadians because it was written by the country's legendary governor general, John Buchan).

"The premise of it took place in Africa," he recalled. "There was a town called Blaauwildebeestfontein. I loved the title, so I hitchhiked to Culver City and made a record of it."

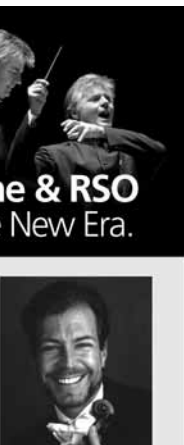
The result? "I was a failure at 15," Anka laughed.

Fortunately for him, Sinatra, Johnny Carson (Anka wrote Carson's "The Tonight Show" theme) and pop music in general, he headed to New York the following year. This time he brought with him a more traditional song about a 16-year-old's unrequited love for an older woman.

"Diana" became a No. 1 hit and turned a short kid whose voice hadn't quite matured into an overnight teen idol.

Fifty years later, he's still short but the voice is deeper and richer and the '50s-style pop star pompadour is gone, having surrendered to a slightly receding hairline.

He is especially proud that he has placed a *Billboard* Top 50 hit on the charts in every decade of his career.



Christopher Collins Lee
Violin soloist

Currently enjoying his sixth season as concertmaster of the RSO.