



VOX 3
a vocal music collective

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VOX 3 PRESENTS A RECITAL OF SHAKESPEARE IN SONG

FREE PERFORMANCE OF NEW CHICAGO VOCAL COLLECTIVE ART SONG SERIES

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(Chicago, IL) VOX 3, a new Chicago-based vocal music collective, presents a new monthly series of recitals to celebrate the rich heritage of art song around the world. The second performance is comprised of richly varied settings of poetry by William Shakespeare. This program, entitled *Blithe and Bonny*, occurs at Bethany United Church of Christ on June 4, 2007, and is part of one of the only privately sponsored art song series in the Chicago area. The evening includes works by composers Gabriel Faure, Ernest Chausson, Virgil Thomson, Gerald Finzi, Erich Korngold, Richard Strauss, and jazz great George Shearing. Featured vocalists are soprano Rebecca Prescott, soprano Ashlee Hardgrave, tenor Brian Hoffman, and baritone Brian von Rueden. Pianist James Morehead will provide accompaniment for the concert.

“Between the spheres of university and superstar professional singers, there is very little support for art song as a genre,” says VOX 3 Artistic Director Brian von Rueden. “Our new monthly series hopes to rectify that with solid musical performances of diverse repertoire. This concert blends a quartet of talented singer-actors, a dynamic pianist, a jumble of rich poetry, and a spectacularly varied slate of compositions to explore the fascinating range of music inspired by the words of Shakespeare.”

William Shakespeare, perhaps the most renowned wordsmith of the English language, has inspired musicians for centuries. Operas have been penned to his poetry by composers from Gounod to Verdi to Britten. However, art song settings of Shakespeare uniquely capture the nuance and rhythm of his verse. British composer Gerald Finzi, Austrian émigré Erich Korngold, and American Virgil Thomson capture the essence of Shakespeare in his native tongue, while Frenchmen Faure and Chausson and German Richard Strauss lend other colors to his words in translation. Including the cycles “Let Us Garlands Bring,” “Ophelia-Lieder,” and “Shylock,” this program demonstrates the breadth of styles aroused by the Bard. The final selections of the evening are taken from jazz great George Shearing’s choral suite, “Music to Hear,” a collection of Shakespearean sonnets and songs which combine Elizabethan melody with jazzy harmonies. Accomplished pianist James Morehead joins a quartet of spectacular actor-singers including soprano Rebecca Prescott, soprano Ashlee Hardgrave, tenor Brian Hoffman, and baritone Brian von Rueden as VOX 3 presents its second monthly program of art song.

Soprano **Rebecca Prescott**, a rancher's daughter from Jerome, Idaho, is a Master of Music graduate of Roosevelt University, where she studied with Richard Stilwell. She has played roles onstage ranging from Desdemona in *Othello* with the Idaho Shakespeare Festival to The Governess in *The Turn of the Screw* with Sienna Repertory Theatre to Yum-Yum in *The Mikado* and Low-Dive Jenny in *The Threepenny Opera*. She also starred as Luisa in *The Fantasticks* and Sally in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* with the Three-Sided Players. She has performed often with the Millennium Chamber Players, having sung Lucia in Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, Barbarina in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, and the soprano solo in J.S. Bach's *Mass*

in G-major. Most recently, she garnered rave reviews for her turn as Josephine in *H.M.S Pinafore* in Hyde Park this year. Soprano **Ashlee Hardgrave** holds the M.M. in Voice Performance from Roosevelt University and the B.A. in Music from Arkansas Tech University. Recent opera roles include Despina in *Così fan tutte* for Intimate Opera Chicago, Miss Wordsworth in *Albert Herring* and Lucy in *The Beggar's Opera* for Chicago College of Performing Arts. Her recent concert projects include a collaboration with ATU alumni and Night Dances, a music and dance concert with the Space/Movement Project of Chicago. An avid supporter of original works, she premiered *The Rumi Cycle* by Adam Gustafson in 2003 and Ron Hill's "Snowy Night" in 2006. She has written two one-woman shows, *Ain't It Grand?* in 2002 and *Five Alive!* in 2006. She has been a featured soloist for jazz bands throughout the country, performing at Spin, The Casino and 410 clubs in Chicago, and at the Dresden Nightclub in Los Angeles with Marty and Elaine. Tenor **Brian Hoffman** is from Carpentersville, Illinois. He completed his Bachelor of Music degree at the Chicago College of Performing Arts, where he studied with Myron Myers and Michael Best. Hoffman has appeared on the operatic stage as the Male Chorus in Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* and as Count Perrucchetto in Cimarosa's *L'infedeltà fedele* with the Millennium Chamber Players. Other operatic roles include The Snowman in *A Childhood Miracle*, Don Curzio in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Federico in *L'amico Fritz*. Most recently, Mr. Hoffman played the title role in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* and Henry in *The Fantasticks* with the Three-,Sided Players. Baritone **Brian von Rueden** originally hails from Wausau, Wisconsin. He earned his Master of Music degree from Roosevelt University and his Bachelor of Music degree from Valparaiso University. Mr. von Rueden has appeared in various opera roles, including Count Almaviva in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, Melibeo in the U.S. premiere of Cimarosa's *L'infedeltà fedele*, and Tarquinius in Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, all with Chicago's Millennium Chamber Players. While living in Dresden, Germany, presented recitals with Christoph Heinig of the Semperoper at the Pianosalon Dresden and Schloss Siebeneichen in Meissen. Von Rueden has also made a name for himself in concert repertoire, having sung several cantatas and masses of J.S. Bach, most notably with the early music group Ars Musica Chicago.

Pianist **James Morehead** is an Adjunct Professor of Music Theory/History and German Diction at Chicago College of Performing Arts of Roosevelt University and is staff accompanist for voice lessons, recitals and opera theater. He is also the choir master/organist at St. Helena's Episcopal Church in Burr Ridge. Morehead received his M. M. in Piano Performance and Music Theory from CCPA and his B. M. in Piano Performance from Duquesne University. His teachers have included Klaus Ebling, Emma S. Rocco, Kenneth Burky and Dmitry Rachmanov. He collaborated with Erin Carlisle-Norton and Adam Gustafson on a new work entitled "Fingers and Toes," and also premiered Gustafson's *The Rumi Cycle* with soprano Ashlee Hardgrave. Morehead has performed throughout Chicago in recitals at Roosevelt University, Northwestern University, DePaul University and the University of Chicago. He has also appeared as a featured cabaret pianist at Gentry on Halsted, Spin Nightclub, Davenport's, the 410 Club and The Casino. Finally, Morehead has participated in the Other Dance Festival, the Around the Coyote Festival, has worked with the Space/Movement project, and is currently involved with ecnDANCEWORKS.

VOX 3 is a collective of artists who educate both performers and audience through varied presentations of vocal music. The group's members perform music, execute administrative functions in the organization and educate the public about vocal music through concerts and quarterly publications of original articles.

Admission to *Blithe and Bonny* is free, although donations are welcome. The concert begins at 7:00pm on Monday, June 4, 2007. Bethany United Church of Christ is located at 4250 N. Paulina Street, Chicago, Illinois, 60613.