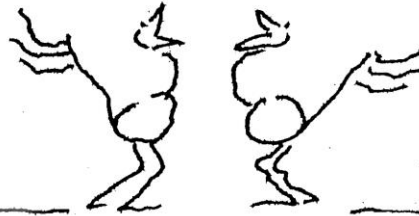


NEWSLETTER

MELODIOUS ACCORD



FALL 2015, VOL. 31, NO. 1

WELCOME TO THE FALL 2015 MELODIOUS ACCORD E-NEWSLETTER!

This print version was adapted from the e-newsletter distributed on November 3, 2015.

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Melodious Accord believes that melody is an unparalleled means of communication for human beings; that when we use our ears and voices we enrich our lives through creating communities of sound; and that singing together brings immediate benefits - physical, mental and spiritual - to those who join in this most participatory of all the arts.

THE VIEW FROM HERE



It's not literally outside my window, but up and down a small hill, and then down a curving side track, lies the dam on Singing Brook, along with a picnic area. It has been the focal point of this summer's activities, with the most amazing run of beautiful days that I can remember. My father built the dam in the early 1930s. All of us learned to swim there, ignoring the freezing water and making use of whatever assemblage of inner tubes, rafts and boats was available at the moment.

This is the first place that the spring-fed brook can get prolonged sunlight, so it doesn't warm up (relatively speaking) until we've had three or four hot nights, usually in what we call 'corn weather', in August. A tractor bridge stretches over its three small spillways. Some awkward stone steps lead down into the water, but many folks prefer a plunge off the bridge, rather than the inch-by-inch torment of wading in. It's about 25 yards across; kids get a placard saying **ISWAMTHEDAM** when they can negotiate the whole way across and back without a life jacket.

This year there have been many people of all ages enjoying a large raft built by my son-in-law. It's tethered in the middle by two sack-anchors which allow it to swing in a wide circle. The kids swim out to it, dive and jump off of it, jostle each other for sole possession, and generally have endless pleasure in its being there. Occasionally I'll come down for my afternoon visit and see one hardy grown-up, stretched out on the raft, soaking up the sun. But that's only when no kids are present. Grownups seem to prefer floating around, partially submerged, on under-inflated inner tubes.

The picnic area is ideal for large groups, with a BBQ cooker and tables and chairs for food and visiting. But it's also lovely on a hot afternoon just to sit by the water, enjoying a cool breeze, some iced tea and a good book. We should all be so lucky. It's the exact opposite of work-driven winter days!

BUSY SUMMER DAYS

In June I received an unexpected birthday party from [Chorus America](#), when they presented me with a huge bouquet of balloons and a raucous rendition of *Hark, I hear the harps eternal* at the end of their annual Conference in Boston. Ann Meier Baker and I had just had a lively discussion of the history of that organization, and the reasons for its success, and the hall was full of people who are the backbone of our profession. ([Click here for a video of the interview.](#))

That same day, after lunch in the hotel lobby (the only place tall enough to accommodate the balloons), and a quick nap, we headed across the river to Cambridge and Harvard's Loeb Hall, a Colonial mansion designed for elegant parties. At this celebration, [Harvard Glee Club](#) & [The Harvard Glee Club Foundation](#) awarded me the Harvard Glee Club Medal, given to all the past Glee Club Conductors and other musical luminaries. I was considerably nonplussed to find myself listed with the likes of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Nadia Boulanger, Robert Shaw, and Helmuth Rilling (among many others) -- I don't think of myself working at that level. But I did appreciate a lovely evening with friends and family (I'm not used to seeing my kids that dressed up!) with delicious drinks and dinner, and lots of conversation and speeches. It took quite a while to come down from those heights -- and one of the balloons is still aloft now, in October.

On the composing side, May 29, 30 and 31 saw the first performances of *Heavenly Hurt: Songs of Love and Loss*, setting seven poems of Emily Dickinson for mixed chorus, cello and harp. Commissioned by a fine local chorus, Da Camera Singers, the work is a miniature Requiem, giving musical life to Emily's musings on the mysteries of death and life. She is immediate, frank and very human in her response to the loss of a loved one: the tone is very different from the traditional Roman text, or even Brahms' lovely quotations from the Bible. "Why give, if you must take away the Loved?" Yet we are redeemed by Love where, within its turmoil, we find glimpses of Paradise.

Then, at the end of the summer, the local Mohawk Trail Concerts (which brings chamber music to our resonant Federated Church) gave a free program in loving memory of Ruth Lloyd Black. She and her husband Arnold had founded the concerts 46 years ago, and she had been a guiding spirit until her recent death. Many of us on the Board donated our talents to present a program of vocal and instrumental music that spanned three centuries, with four premieres in her honor. My contribution was three songs for Soprano and Piano entitled *Dickinson: On Recollecting*. The poems deal with remembering and forgetting with a very light touch, beginning with confusing the two, and ending with a glorious invocation of sunset: "To die divinely once a twilight/than wane is easier." The overflow audience at the concert itself seemed a realization of Arnie and Ruth's dream of a community of chamber music in this tiny church in Charlemont, Massachusetts.

-- Alice Parker



NEW PUBLICATIONS

There are no new publications to report in this issue.

BOARD NOTES

SEPTEMBER MEETING

The Board of Trustees meets three times a year – in January, May, and September – to conduct the business of the organization. Our most recent agenda in September was typically full with Alice’s ongoing work as Artistic Director and the financial overview presented by our Managing Director, Paula Talayco.

The Board heard about developments for the exciting Symposium in late October called **Raising the Song: Creating Communities that Sing**. Ellen Johnston, Director of the Virginia Seminary Center for Liturgy and Music reviewed plans for the two-day event which is a joint project between Melodious Accord and the seminary. Watch for a complete report on the symposium in our next newsletter!

The September meeting is also the time for the election of officers, if needed. We are pleased to announce that Michèle Eaton, former Secretary, now brings her financial skills to the job of Treasurer. Ellen Sisson has graciously agreed to serve as interim Secretary until one is elected.

Alice presented her upcoming schedule over the next several months, including the commissions she is working on currently. She also introduced a new proposal for a recording of her settings of Emily Dickinson’s poetry for Winter 2016.

If you haven’t claimed your participation in the **#Alicels90**, do go to the Melodious Accord website and join the list of those who will help celebrate Alice’s 90th birthday year between December 2015 and 2016. Don’t be left out of this important celebration.

-- Marilyn Haskel, Co-Chair, Melodious Accord Board

MEET THE BOARD

William Bradley Roberts, DMA, is co-chair of Melodious Accord, a position he has held since January, 2013. His involvement with Melodious Accord began when he participated in a “January in New York” fellows program in 1991. In those days the fellows worked with Alice at her home on West End Avenue, and stayed with the nuns at the Community of the Holy Spirit on West 113th Street.



Bill is Professor of Church Music and Director of Chapel Music at Virginia Theological Seminary (Episcopal) in Alexandria, VA. Prior to his current position he was musician in several Episcopal parishes, the most recent being St. John's, Lafayette Square, Washington. He is a composer whose works appear with a number of publishers and whose music is featured on a Gothic recording made recently at the National Cathedral. Bill enjoys leading workshops as a conductor, composer and liturgist.

Bill’s connection with the newly founded Center of Liturgy and Music at Virginia Seminary led to its co-sponsorship and hosting of the symposium **Raising the Song: Creating Communities that Sing**.

CALLING ALL CHOIRS!

What's better than 90 candles on your cake? 90 (or more) choirs from around the world singing your music and sharing it online! Join Melodious Accord as we celebrate Alice's upcoming significant birthday with a unique, online birthday celebration: [#AliceIs90](#). Amateur and professional ensembles of all ages and sizes are welcome.



[Visit the new page on our website to learn more and to register your choir.](#)

EDITORIAL

HARMONY

A recent reviewer of my book *The Answering Voice: The Beginnings of Counterpoint* chided me for ignoring the noble art of Harmony. My response to this is that almost every theory book for the past three hundred years has been dealing with Harmony -- and I'm trying to counter that preoccupation with a new look at Melody and Counterpoint.

We are so used to hearing tonal harmony that it seems present even when not sounded. In my classes, it takes time and effort to convince students that 'harmonizing' is not 'counterpointing'. Singing harmony (3rds-based triads and all their extensions) means that you are caught in tonality -- major and minor scales -- with all those chords riding on every pitch. I'm asking for a modal rather than a tonal approach: there is no 'tonic', no V-I cadence, no expectation of over-familiar patterns. Instead, the contrapuntal response is most simply based on the melodic elements just heard. In my practice, text and rhythm and pitch supply the elements of both statement and response.

We are singing and answering, not writing notes on paper. The page will never tell you when and how to come in: the sound of one particular voice singing that particular line at this particular moment opens the possibility of response. Change any of these and the response will be different. The page stops the music: one can look back and forward at the same time and construct an answer. In improvising, there's no time for thinking. The answer comes from listening intently to the sung melody and finding the tiny clue that invites you into a conversation.

In the Renaissance period this kind of conversation was as comfortable as tonality is now. There wasn't the urge to hear chords, or to write down the music before you could figure out a counter-line. Stepping into the melody -- into its own sounds -- was as natural as breathing. It's only difficult now because we're not used to that kind of listening: hearing the slightest play with pitch or rhythm or language, recognizing the moment when one can join the ongoing motion. (It's just plain hard for us to leave the theory behind and enter the sound-world of the song. I remember being taught to invent an answer -- do something original, new, different. Echoing is the opposite kind of involvement.)

Imagine hearing a beautiful melody and wanting to join in -- but you don't know what's coming next. In the pauses of the song you might echo a bit of the phrase just heard. You are not disturbing the melody in any way: it does not wait for you to finish your reply, or adapt itself to your efforts. It floats on serenely, and you respond to its presence with gentle assurances that Yes, you are listening. You are using its own elements to support and encourage it, rather like keeping a balloon in the air by gentle pushes.

This requires what I call primary listening. You are not anticipating what the melody will do, or supplying any theoretical framework to its motion. The song sets up its own world, and you enter into the world as you limit your answers to what you have just heard. These sounds have just been created: none others exist. I'll even insist on the same syllable on the same pitch in the same rhythmic design. Your primary decision is when to enter; the second is which word to echo at that entrance. All else follows from that first response. (Keep your phrases very brief: you are listening to the ongoing song, anticipating the next opportunity to echo.)

Once we have found this first entrance, others follow more easily. We keep listening intently for whatever subtle changes the first singer is making: the tune is never exactly the same. It is possible to improvise a lovely two-part setting of a song in this way -- or often, in my class, getting a multi-voice improvisation going, much more elaborate than we would ever think of writing -- or reading! This sound-world is what we have lost with our pre-occupation with the page, and with vertical rather than horizontal responses.

In fact, I believe that we teach Harmony entirely backward, when we teach rules for laboriously moving from one chord to another. The bass-line to a Bach Chorale could never be arrived at by the laws of Harmony: it's actually a lovely contrapuntal design that happens to occur at the same time as the melody. Study the cadences within the melody: are you 'at home' or 'away from home'? If you are away, how far away? Can you write a first and last note for the bass line in each phrase? Now you can stop the music, write it down, and figure out how to form a line that reflects the melody with mostly reverse curves, moving easily from that first note to the last. Only when this line is just right do you begin to ask Which chord is called for here, and How can the alto or tenor part supply just the right inner notes to add up to a satisfying harmonic progression. Rather than calculating from the beginning, you often work backwards from the cadence point. [No choir can improvise a Bach harmonization.]

So the harmony turns out to 'result' from the interweaving of melodies. Rather than being a discipline of its own, it is based on counterpoint, which grows out of the melody. So we return to that single-line of song that each one of us can sing. All the rest of our theory springs from that source.

-- Alice Parker

CORRESPONDENCE

From a (frequent) Fellow, who attended Alice's session at the ACDA Conference in Salt Lake City:

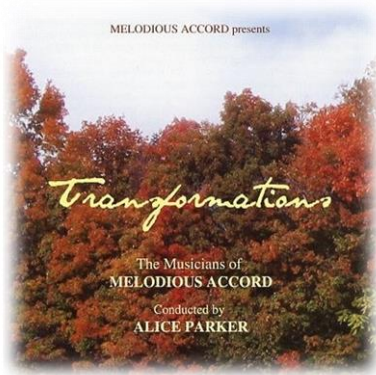
I sat behind two young women who had to be beginning teachers. (Did you notice how many 30 and under were in that room?) Both were very wrapped up in what you had to say, and hung on every word. Then, at the end, you led us in singing: they put their arms around each other and started to weep, [happy] tears of I GET THIS! It was a tiny but beautiful story to witness.

From a young Fellow studying conducting, to whom Alice sent some words of advice and encouragement:

I cannot tell you what a positive impact [your message] had on me. It was such a good reminder of everything you taught me in January--all the reasons I am doing music in the first place. It's also comforting to hear you say that this is a life's work. I need to be patient with myself. I also distinctly remember you talking about the fact that music on the page is just a glimmer, a representation, of the living, breathing music that is flowing all around us...that we just need to continually try to tap into the source that is far beyond us. What a beautiful thing that is to remember.

SHOP WINDOW

TRANSFORMATIONS



Transformations, according to Webster's Dictionary, occur when something changes "shape, appearance or character." All of the melodies in this collection existed first as traditional songs, handed down from singer to singer through many generations, and kept alive because of their expression of human emotions.

This early recording by the Musicians of Melodious Accord combines a church cantata with three folk-song suites, all arranged for chorus and instruments and conducted by Alice Parker. The Melodious Accord cantata joins chorus, soli, harp and brass quartet in thirteen shape-note hymns of extraordinary beauty. The rollicking folksongs include ballads, lullabies, love songs and dance tunes in settings for chorus and piano.

Originally issued by The Musical Heritage Society in 1991 as an LP, it has here been remastered in CD format, with a handsome cover of trees transformed by their autumnal foliage. It makes a lovely gift for people of all ages who enjoy good singing.

Click on the cover photo above to order your copy now, and visit the [Melodious Accord Store](#) to see all the recordings and publications that are available.

MELODIOUS ACCORD FELLOWS PROGRAMS



MELODY STUDIES - REPORT

Seven Fellows gathered at Alice's home in July for five days of singing and exploring the very nature of many styles of song. Each participant sang, analyzed and notated a different folk song each day, as the group discussed what goes on in group singing, and how to encourage both communicative performance and the possibilities of improvisation. In answer to the question "What is the most important thing you learned?" they responded variously:

- Really to *listen*. . . This was a life-changing experience. . . a breath of fresh air for me as a musician, conductor, singer, pianist and arranger.
- Text as speech pattern. . . freeing [me] from the tyranny of the page to the endless possibilities inherent in the song itself.
- I recaptured the creativity and freedom of song.

COMPOSERS WORKSHOP - REPORT

Five composers arrived in late September for a few days of pondering the mysteries of the craft of writing for voices. We sang, studied, listened and laughed together, exploring what happens when we sing for and with each other. The combination of text, rhythms and tones holds endless fascination and it is a pleasure to get back to the true fundamentals of our art. We studied melodies and poems in the morning, with many digressions into theoretical and practical aspects, and each composer presented some of his or her own work in the afternoon. Responses to our request for feedback included:

- I learned to listen better; think less harmonically, more melodically; have a whole new appreciation for folksongs. It will inform every aspect of my work. I'm refreshed and invigorated and brimming with new ideas.
- I learned to listen and listen again, and not to write a single note till the roots of my composition are well established in my head and ears. Less is more.
- Ear before eye; rhythm of text; listen to everything; page is only an aide to memory; set aside time to compose.
- Thanks for this opportunity, for imparting great wisdom and sharing such abundant hospitality.
- The most unique and comprehensive workshop I have ever had the privilege of attending.

JANUARY IN NEW YORK

JANUARY 18-20, 2016

This year's Score Study will be based on a new Alice Parker composition entitled **Heavenly Hurt: Songs of Love and Loss**. The 20 minute cantata, setting seven poems by Emily Dickinson for chorus, cello and piano, is a kind of Requiem, centering around her plea: "Oh God – why give if thou must take away the Loved?" Paired with this will be a comparison of J. S. Bach's **Cantata 187** with his **Mass in G minor**; the two works share several movements . Other shorter works by Parker will be examined: **O Virtus Sapientiae**, a choral setting of a Hildegard of Bingen chant; and two wonderful songs from the Jewish tradition: **La Rosa** and **El Ginat**.

Participants will gather for three full days of intensive study of varied repertoire. Alice shares her ideas about how best to articulate the style, and release its unique sound. "We try to recreate the composer's process as the work came into being, so that we can re-create it now through our own understanding of it," says Alice.

For more information on this and other Melodious Accord Fellows programs, visit our website, www.melodiousaccord.org.

HELP SUPPORT OUR PROGRAMS

We welcome your interest and your support. Melodious Accord, Inc. is incorporated in the State of New York as a non-profit organization under IRS code 501(c)(3). Contributions are deductible to the full extent of the law.

If you wish to make a contribution you may do so through PayPal online (go to <http://melodiousaccord.org/contribute> and click on the Donate button), or you can mail a check to our office in New York.

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FOLLOW MELODIOUS ACCORD ONLINE

Please visit Melodious Accord online to stay current with Alice's new publications, photos and videos, and information about upcoming workshops and projects. For those on Facebook and Twitter, please 'like' and follow our new pages.

Website: www.melodiousaccord.org
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/melodiousaccord>
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/melodiousaccord>

CALENDAR

FOLLOW ALICE PARKER ON THE MOVE

2015

October	26-27	RAISING THE SONG! Symposium on Song Leading	Alexandria, VA
November	14-15	Hymn Singing and Workshop at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church and Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church	Minneapolis, MN
December	5	Workshop with the Swarthmore College Garnet Singers and SING!	Swarthmore, PA
	27	Annual CAROL SING at the Charlemont Federated Church	Charlemont, MA
January	16	Melodious Accord Board Meeting	New York, NY
	17	Annual SPIRITUALS SING at the Cathedral of St John the Divine	New York, NY
	18-20	MA Fellows: Score Study at St Ignatius Church	Hawley, MA

For information about any of these events, write to kay@aliceparker.com, or call 413-536-1753.