

OF SPECIAL INTEREST

NICHE ORCHESTRAS AND CHOIRS REPRESENT SPECIFIC PROFESSIONS AND CULTURES IN THEIR MUSIC-MAKING. *by* LIBBY SLATE

FOR MUSICIANS, MISSING A REHEARSAL IS frowned upon. But music director Gary S. Greene and choral director Jim Raycroft have learned to be philosophical about empty seats at their practices: Work comes first.

That's because Greene and Raycroft lead, respectively, the Los Angeles Lawyers Philharmonic and choral partner Legal Voices, both made up of legal professionals.

"Lawyers have trials, they have depositions, they go out of town," says Greene, himself an attorney with the dual specialties of personal injury and real estate. "We have 75 lawyers in the orchestra and 100 more on call."

Southern California is home to numerous community orchestras and choruses. Many take their names from their geographic home base. Others reflect members' professions, cultural heritage or ethnic backgrounds.

The Los Angeles Doctors Symphony Orchestra offers concerts in Santa Monica (April 28) and Culver City (June 9). The JPL Chorus, made up of singing scientists and others who work at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, has performed with the Pasadena Symphony and Pasadena Pops.

The Southeast Symphony, composed primarily of African-American musicians, performs pieces by

Music director Gary S. Greene founded the Los Angeles Lawyers Philharmonic, above, 10 years ago. He added Legal Voices in 2011 and the jazz-oriented Big Band of Barristers in 2012.

African-American composers along with classical standards. The Santa Cecilia Orchestra focuses on Latino music and classical repertory.

Several niche groups mark significant anniversaries this year.

Greene established the Lawyers Phil 10 years ago, inspired in part by his uncle, Ernst Katz, founder in 1937 of the Jr. Philharmonic Orchestra of California. Lawyers Phil plays Broadway and film music, pop and classical pieces.

Greene added Legal Voices in 2011 and the jazz-oriented Big Band of Barristers in 2012. Upcoming concerts include a 10th-anniversary celebration June 29 at Walt Disney Concert Hall downtown. One of the vocal soloists will be family law attorney Michael Maguire—a 1987 Tony Award winner as Enjolras in *Les Misérables*.

Just as in their day jobs, the lawyer performers "all have the discipline and the extra dedication," Greene says. "And the passion is extreme." Lawyers Phil members are almost exclusively attorneys; Legal Voices includes attorneys, law students, librarians, paralegals, secretaries, even the host of a legal-themed radio show.



Unlike his day job, Greene has the final say when it comes to the judges in his ensemble. "If I want a different dynamic, for instance, I stop and explain why," he says. "Sometimes I've had a discussion—but I rule!"

Raycroft, Legal Voices choral director since 2012, also has judges in his group. "One is an associate justice of the state of California Court of Appeal," he says. "I know him as Steve." That would be Justice Steven Z. Perren.

Raycroft, a member of the Los Angeles Master Chorale for almost 35 years, does not have a legal background. "I'm the only one who has no business being here," he says with a laugh. But that's OK: "A criminal defense attorney said to me, 'This is the only time of the week I get to stop thinking about law.'"

Lawyers Phil concerts often raise money for organizations that provide legal services for people who couldn't otherwise afford them.

Observing its 25th anniversary is the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony, founded by Noreen Green after she presented and conducted a concert of Jewish music as part of her doctoral requirement; conductor-educator Murry Sidlin suggested she start an orchestra.

"My whole life, I'd looked to Jewish music to connect me to Judaism," says Green, artistic director and conductor of the ensemble; five years ago, she also founded the American Jewish University Choir. Not all orchestra members are Jewish, however, and not all the music is religious.

"The debate is: If you're not using the Jewish musical tropes, then it's not Jewish music," Green says. "I say Jewish music is music that [represents] the Jewish experience. Aaron Copland identified as Jewish, but his

Jeffrey Bernstein leads the choral group Los Angeles Daiku, formed to perform Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Right: Noreen Green is artistic director-conductor of the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony, which she founded 25 years ago.

music doesn't sound that way. I seek out music with a deep connection to Jewish history and culture."

The ensemble's next public program—"Harmony and Friendship," Aug. 17 at Disney Hall—is a collaboration with the orchestra and choir of the

Los Angeles Korean-American Musicians' Association.

The concert features the West Coast premiere of Lucas Richman's *This Will Be Our Reply*, a symphony composed for the Leonard Bernstein centennial referencing a Bernstein quote about music being a reply to violence.

"I feel it's very important to do interfaith, multicultural concerts," says Green, noting that Korean households often own a copy of the Talmud, the text from which Jewish religious law and theology derive, as a blueprint to living a good life.

The symphony's educational outreach, A Patchwork of Cultures, explores connections between Sephardic Jews and Latinos at underserved LAUSD elementary schools, parochial schools and Jewish day schools. "My raison de living is to make connections with people through music and to combat bigotry," Green says.

Jeffrey Bernstein, artistic director of Los Angeles Daiku, echoes that sentiment. The choral group was formed specifically to perform Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, whose beloved final choral movement is known as the *Ode to Joy*.

"The text speaks to brotherhood and getting along with everyone," says Bernstein, who founded L.A. Daiku

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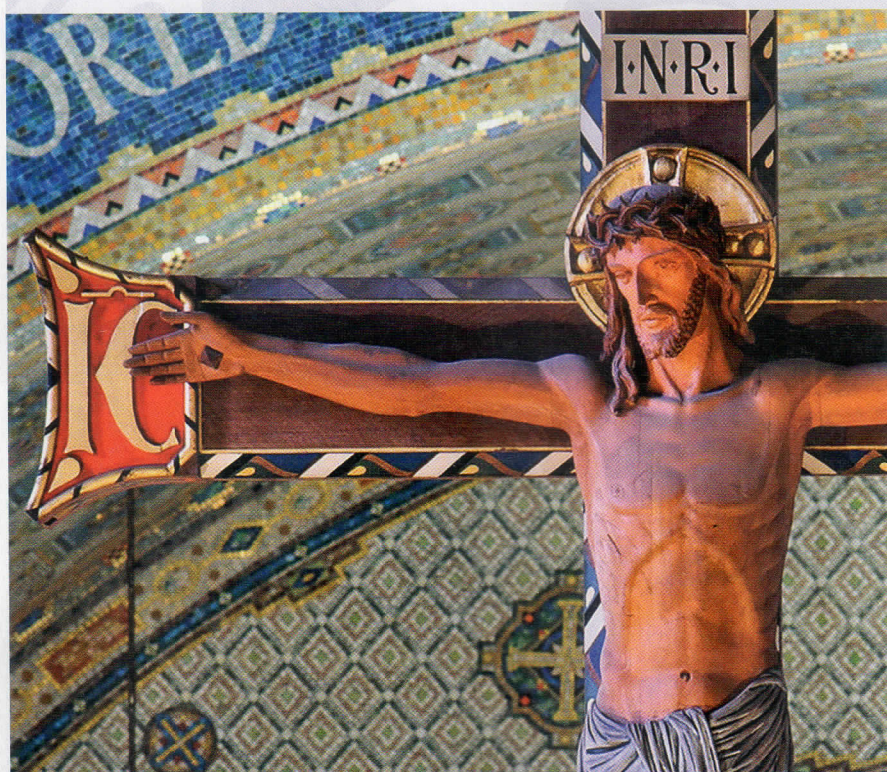
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in 2009; he is also artistic and executive director of the Pasadena Master Chorale. The group is the first such chorus outside of Japan, where the Ninth is performed hundreds of times a year. In Japan, the *Ode to Joy* is known simply as *daiku*, literally "number nine."

The Ninth was first performed in Japan by German troops captured by the Japanese in China during World War I and placed in prison camps in Japan. The soldiers formed a ragtag ensemble using instruments made from boxes; the Japanese audience, unaccustomed to Western music, was, says Bernstein, "blown away."

The L.A. group was founded, says Bernstein, to "create bridges of friendship with this music." Most members were born in Japan; non-Japanese singers are welcome.

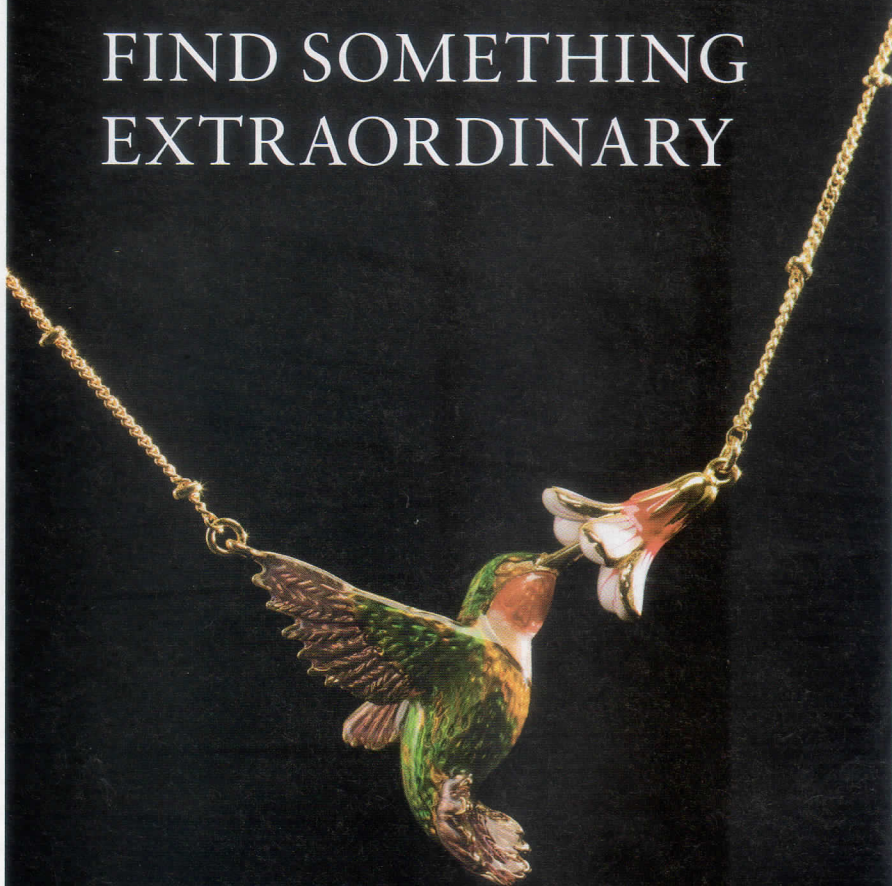
The ensemble also performs other classical and Japanese pieces. Its 10th-anniversary concert, May 18 at Gardena Valley Baptist Church in Gardena, includes *Furusato* ("My Home Town"), a set of nostalgic Japanese folk songs.

Yet another ensemble marking its 10th anniversary is the Inner City Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles (ICYOLA), founded by Charles "Chuck" Dickerson III to provide music education, performing opportunities and career preparation to inner city students.

Most orchestra members are African American; about 25 percent are Latino. They range in age from 11 to 19; college grads in their 20s return to play with the group.

ICYOLA presents orchestral and contemporary repertory. The latter includes /CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

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/CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

Dickerson's setting of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, which it performed at the 2011 unveiling of the King memorial in Washington, D.C.

"We play the same pieces the L.A. Phil plays," says Dickerson, also conducting instructor and director of special ensembles at Cal State Dominguez Hills. "We don't play reductions or simplifications."

Next up is Faure's Requiem at the Rolling Hills United Methodist Church (April 19) and the season finale at Disney Hall (July 7), which includes a tribute to Aretha Franklin. "To be able to take young people from our community and have them perform on that stage is a lifetime opportunity," he says. "For the audience, it provides an opportunity to go where otherwise they wouldn't."

ICYOLA also runs the ICYOLA Academy, which teaches LAUSD elementary school students to play instruments. It has partnered with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and USC Thornton School of Music for the Los Angeles Orchestra Fellowship, a two-year program that mentors string players of color, who are underrepresented in U.S. symphony orchestras, in order to better prepare them for orchestral auditions.

Though the niche directors, players and singers take their music-making seriously, a number of directors say that, even with some less than stellar auditions, they have never turned away an interested performer.

As Raycroft says, "They are here to have a good time." 