

# Literary Inspiration

Stirring words of three Granite State writers serve as backdrop for composer Jonathan Santore's new works

By JULIA ANN WEEKES  
NH Weekend Editor

**T**he moving words of a woman struggling with a progressive neurodegenerative disease. The stirring story of an abolitionist fighting for civil rights in the face of virulent opposition. The heartfelt account of the country's emotional response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City.

For Plymouth State University Professor of Music Jonathan Santore, the poignant writings of three Granite State authors have served as inspiration for a trio of compositions to be performed throughout New Hampshire this spring.

First, as part of an 8 p.m. concert at the Silver Center for the Arts at Plymouth State College on Saturday, April 19, the PSU Chamber Singers will premiere a piece in which Santore sets to music a poem written by longtime PSU Professor and colleague Jane Babin from her recently published book, "Pearls in the Pond." Babin, a Laconia native and alumna of PSU and the Franklin Pierce Law Center, spent the majority of her career as a professor in the PSU Department of Business. A year after being diagnosed in 2004 with ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease), Babin retired and devoted herself full-time to writing about life with the debilitating disease as well as patients' rights and doctor-patient communication. In 2006 she was awarded an honorary doctorate of humane letters by PSU for her work in these areas.

"Jane is a personal friend of mine," Santore said. "While we were in different departments at PSU, we got to know each other because her son and my oldest son are the same age and were at the PSU Child Development and Family Center together. It isn't open in the summer, so Jane and I spent a lot of time getting our kids together



Dan Perkins, shown here with members of the New Hampshire Master Chorale, is founder and music director for that group, as well as Plymouth State University's director of choral activities and The Manchester Choral Society's music director. He will present a handful of composer Jonathan Santore's new works in performances throughout New Hampshire this spring.

for play dates in the summers. I've been keeping in touch with Jane since her illness became severe ..."

Santore said it was another PSU colleague, Richard Sparks, and his wife, Jan, who suggested that the composer base a musical score on one of Babin's poems.

"I read Jane's book, 'Pearls in the Pond', and chose the poem that spoke to me most strongly," he said of a piece of prose called "Forges-ting."

For a string of concerts in Andover, Concord and Plymouth in May, Santore focused on another resilient figure, Plymouth native Nathaniel P. Rogers (1794-1846), in crafting a piece titled "Then Shall Be Heard Music Here."

"Rogers, who grew up in a house that was located where PSU's Silver Center for the Arts now stands (and which was rumored to have served as a stop on the Underground Railroad), was a successful lawyer in Plymouth when he became deeply involved in the abolitionist cause," Santore said. "He later moved to Concord to edit the abolitionist newspaper Herald of Freedom, which was admired at length at the time in essays by (Henry David) Thoreau and John Greenleaf Whit- tier, among others."

Santore said he became ac-



COMPOSER JONATHAN SAN-

quainted with Rogers at a recent PSU ceremony at the Silver Center, where a portrait and plaque honoring the civil rights advocate were rededicated and a portion of his writings read by his great-great-granddaughter, Sarah Kintner.

"It was Rogers' words themselves that inspired me — I was totally unfamiliar with his writings until his relative quoted some of them," Santore said. "They were so noble, so beautiful, so inspiring, so forward thinking. This was a man who gave up a successful career as a lawyer and left his family home because of his deep commitment to what was then a very unpopular cause."

"One thing I learned from all this is that abolitionists were deeply unpopular in the North, as well as in the South," he said. "(Rogers') calls for equality and justice for

all humankind are very inspiring. Though not a native myself, knowing that this state could produce a man like Rogers makes me proud to call New Hampshire home."

The New Hampshire Master Chorale will premier the piece at 8 p.m. Friday, May 2, at Proctor Academy in Andover, 8 p.m. Saturday, May 3, at the South Church in Concord, and 4 p.m. Sunday, May 4, at the Plymouth Congregational Church.

As composer in residence for the New Hampshire Master Chorale, Santore said he's "always looking for inspiring, moving text to set, and if I can find text connected to New Hampshire in some way, it's that much more interesting."

For example, his most recent project for the chorus set to music texts about an early leader of the Harlem Renaissance who spent a year working as a janitor at the Hanover Inn before going on to a distinguished literary career in New York City and abroad.

And in the final series of community spring concerts featuring Santore's work, the composer offers a composition titled "Later," which is based on text by poet Liz Ahl, who chairs the English Department at PSU. Centering on the 2001 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City, the piece pre-

miered at PSU's 9/11 memorial concert in 2006, and will be performed by The Manchester Choral Society and narrated by Elizabeth Cox, PSU's director of theatre, at concerts set for 8 p.m. Saturday, May 17, and 3 p.m. Sunday, May 18, at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Manchester.

"One of the great blessings of working at Plymouth State is getting to work with such wonderfully talented colleagues," Santore said. "My colleague Dan Perkins may be the hardest-working man in New Hampshire. He's our director of choral activities (at PSU), as well as serving as music director of the Manchester Choral Society, and founder and music director of the New Hampshire Master Chorale."

"In 2006, he decided that he wanted to hold a concert at PSU in remembrance of the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy," Santore recalled. "He planned to conduct the 'Mozart Requiem' at that concert, and asked me to compose a work for orchestra using an orchestra identical to the one needed for the Mozart work. In thinking about how to approach this piece, I thought of a poem by our colleague (Ahl), which dealt with the tragedy in a very moving way, talking about the personal contacts made and broken in the context of those events, and our need to sustain them."

"Those are the issues I tried to convey musically in my setting, along with my feelings for New York, the city where my father was born, and the location of my Italian-American heritage," Santore said.

Tickets to the Silver Center for the Arts April 19 concert, the first in series of programs highlighting works by composer Jonathan Santore, are \$10-\$12 for adults, \$8-\$10 for seniors, \$6-\$7 for youth and \$4-\$5 for PSU students at box office or by calling 535-ARTS or (800) 779-3869. The program also will feature The PSU Chamber Singers and Chorale in "Dances to Life," a collaborative concert for choir, four-hands piano, percussion and dancers by Mack Wilberg. For more information, contact conductor Dan Perkins at 535-2367 or send E-mail to Danp@plymouth.edu.