

## Narration 1

Good afternoon! We just heard Haydn's "The Heavens are Telling," from his oratorio, The Creation. Its "wondrous works" felt a fitting tribute to our purpose here, today: to celebrate the Creation, 75 years ago of our wondrous, wonderful Monmouth Civic Chorus.

Welcome to our diamond celebration! [applause]


I'm Marilyn Morgovsky – an alto who sang with MCC from 19XX to 20XX.

Gazing at the pictures that played pre-show, I can't help but flash back through the decades. So many wonderful people. So many memories. A picture might paint a thousand words, but a piece of *music* floods the mind, and the heart, with even more potent, poignant memories. So, today, we're going to *sing* you our history, through a sparkling sampler of 75 year's worth of favorite repertoire.

Where to start? The beginning, they say, is a very, very good place to start.

*Our* story begins in 1949. Imagine Monmouth County, then. By 1954, the newly-carved Garden State Parkway snaked south through ever-expanding suburban housing developments, choc-a-bloc with bedrooms whose bassinets squirmed with newborn baby boomers (some of whom are here today, singing and listening). With the Great Depression and World War II finally in the rear view mirror, the exploding population of New Jersey—flush with fattening wallets and the free time for a little fun—funded leisure activities and fed a public craving for live entertainment.

Enter MCC's first director, William Gordon Pagdin. Pagdin gathered 60 singers in Monmouth County to perform for their new neighbors a *blend* of music—both classical and Broadway.

The creation of MCC meant that rather than having to chug on the train to New York City, you could marvel at the quickfire patter of Gilbert & Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance* and luxuriate in the grandeur of Handel's *Messiah*  in Red Bank, at the Count Basie Theater.

Today's concert has a bit of both. We saved some of our favorite show tunes for the second half. During the first half of the concert we will showcase highlights from our history of performing classical works. First up: a piece heard in that very first season, Elgar's romance, "My Love Dwelt in a Northern Land."

## Narration 2

As bobby sox and poodle skirts gave way to tie-dye, bell bottoms, and flower power, MCC's conductor's baton passed from William Gordon Pagdin to Felix Molzer.

Beginning in 1965, Mr. Molzer, a former conductor of the Vienna Boys Choir and founder of Monmouth Conservatory, led the chorus for eight years, further developing its classical and operetta repertoire.

The membership likewise developed, its ranks increasing with an interesting cohort of singers who reflected Monmouth County's unique economic development. MCC members would leave the parking lots of facilities like Bell Labs and Fort Monmouth to come to choir rehearsal.

After working all day researching the Big Bang or tinkering with the telecom technology that would someday become the supercomputer phones we all carry in our pockets, they'd trade the complex calculation of far-flung *cosmological* wavelengths for the visceral, earthy joy of emitting their own, in rehearsal—waves of sound bounced among friends reflecting the harmonies of the heavenly spheres.

Bill Shoppell assumed the directorship in 1974 and would lead the group for 17 years. As he led MCC into the 1980s, singers faced novel challenges, namely seeing Shoppell past the huge hair and padded shoulders in front of them.

As its first two conductors had done, Mr Shoppell took MCC into new territory, increasing the performance schedule of the choir, performing beyond Monmouth County in New York City, Washington, D.C., and foreign cities, on international tours that began under his leadership.

Shoppell shaped Monmouth County's musical landscape, lending his wonderful bass voice as a long term cantor, directing church choirs, and teaching in the Asbury Park and Freehold Regional Schools where he eventually became Freehold Regional's Director of Music.

His broad and positive influence on the Jersey Shore music scene attracted a new significant cohort to join the engineers—music educators and music directors. Chorus, raise your hand if you have experience either as an engineer or a music educator/director.

As you can see the roots of our membership history continue to extend to the present. But the lasting legacy of Bill Shoppell's we're perhaps most proud of was his fostering of MCC's commitment to community involvement. Since 1985 we have awarded over \$85,000 in scholarships to outstanding high school musicians.

As MCC grew with its first three directors, fashions and fads came and went but there remained one constant: Felix Mendelssohn's towering oratorio, *Elijah*. We'll treat you to just two choruses, but don't despair: You'll be able to enjoy the whole shabang, next spring.

### Narration 3

Dr. Mark Shapiro took over as conductor of MCC in 1991 and served for the next two decades. While the Gen X-ers now among us were teens, tying their plaid flannels at the waist, and our tech types feared a Y2K apocalypse, Shapiro was hard at work leading the group to new levels of excellence.

Under his leadership, MCC explored a more diverse repertoire, rediscovered the works of unheralded composers, championed contemporary works, and gave world premieres.

In 2008 Mark and MCC received Chorus America's ASCAP/Alice Parker Award, "recognizing a member chorus for programming significant recently composed music that expands the mission of the chorus and challenges the chorus's audience in a new way."

Dr. Shapiro who currently conducts New York's renowned Cecelia Chorus and graciously offers this video greeting..

[\(Play video from Mark\)](#)

We offer to you two beautiful pieces MCC sang under Mark's direction, and also under Ryan's—a movement from Rachmaninoff's Vespers, and another from Vivaldi's Gloria.

#### Narration 4

Today MCC is being masterfully conducted by Dr. Ryan James Brandau.

Over the last 12 years, Ryan has honored MCC's core values of excellence and innovation. Each week, each rehearsal, he inspires us to seek continuous artistic growth as individuals and as an ensemble, honing vocal technique.

As previous leaders of MCC did, he has taken the group into new territory. To present music by Baroque masters like Monteverdi, Buxtehude, Bach, and Handel, Ryan has brought to Monmouth County the country's leading practitioners of Baroque performance practice, while also exploring repertoire by Latino and Black composers.

While some choruses went dormant during the recent pandemic, Dr. Brandau guided us through the challenges of virtual rehearsing and performing, overseeing two virtual concert films, while, at the same time, garnering national recognition as the third place winner of the American Prize for Choral Conducting.

And here we are today, on the other side of all that, *75 years strong*, cherishing memories of last summer's tour of Italy and Austria, and still riding high from the world premiere performance of Dr. Brandau's "A Song Together," commissioned for our anniversary.

To close the first half of the program, we'll offer a set of pieces that celebrate MCC's rich history. We'll start with Aina-a-that Good News, performed by both Shapiro and Brandau. We'll continue with several works emblematic of Dr. Brandau's capacious scope of repertoire, Mozart's elegant Laudate Dominum and Casals's haunting O Vos Omnes, to the lyrical storytelling of Dolly Parton and the unabashedly soaring chorus from Bernstein's Candide

We hope this gives you just a taste of MCC's breadth of artistry, over these seven and a half decades.

## Narration 5

Welcome back! That was *Brightly Dawns Our Wedding Day* from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*—a show MCC performed in 1961, 1965, 1979, and 1988.

From the very beginning, MCC mixed classical music with music for the stage. In its first five decades, MCC produced operettas and musicals almost every season.

Mounting fully staged productions such as Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore* and *The Pirates of Penzance* meant: all hands on deck.

The chorus has been blessed with many singers over the years capable of contributing their talents both on the stage *and* behind the scenes.

Engineers designed, drafted, and hammered out sets. The seamstresses among us used their tailoring skills to create, alter, repair, and reuse costumes. The artistically oriented painted our eager faces as beautifully as they did our scenic backdrops. Others spiked set pieces and tracked tables covered in props.

Truly—a village-wide collaborative effort exemplifying a core and extraordinary cultural value of MCC: its volunteer spirit.

As a non-profit, we hire only our conductor, accompanist, soloist, and instrumentalists. Otherwise we've functioned for 75 years entirely on the efforts of our members. Marketing, sales, fundraising, development, production, governance—all of it—we're a remarkable, self-functioning organization.

Now let's head back again to our first season in 1950, to the show MCC produced on five different occasions, *Pirates of Penzance*.

## Narration 6

In the 60's, MCC added Broadway musicals to the mix.

As we didn't exactly have deep-pocketed producers to bankroll our productions, our in-house crews rose to the challenge of mounting *full-scale* musicals on a *small-scale* budget.

They designed and built sets that could be reused and retrofitted for future productions. We'd joke: they're so well-built and so durable that we probably oughta get a certificate of occupancy.

And the prop pieces! Indestructible, ever-adaptable. Tevye's milk cart in "Fiddler on the Roof" transformed into Curley's "surrey with the fringe on top" in Oklahoma and reappeared in "Most Happy Fella" for the Sposalizio number. One creation started as a footbridge and ended up as a boulder.

Our NASA-worthy engineers invented some amazing devices— like the machine George Sumrall devised to make a moon travel in an arc across the backdrop during the performance of "New Moon" or the ingenious strap contraption that allowed our own Petrina Picerno to bravely fly through the air as Fruma Sarah in Fiddler on the Roof.

Shows were very much a family affair. In "Fiddler", I played Tevye's wife Golde, while my husband, Joel, was a Russian constable and my daughter, Mikah, was Tevye's daughter Shprintze. Also on stage were Kathy Blinn as grandma Tzeitel, her husband Paul played Avram, and daughter Maureen, another of Tevye's daughters, Bielke.

Our chorus continues this tradition where many of our members have singing and/or non-singing family members in the chorus. Chorus members raise your hand if you have ever had a spouse/partner or other family member in the chorus.

One of those sets of spouses celebrates their thirty-year anniversary this year...I'm not going to imply that their starring opposite each other in the 1994 MCC production of Most Happy Fella had anything to do with that fact, but we'll get to hear Matt and Claire reprise their hilarious duet nevertheless!

That same production featured MCC's legendary leading man, Ken Wasser, as Tony the winemaker, having previously played the role of young ranch hand Joey in the 1976 production.

Broadway loves a good revival, so let's hit it!

## Narration 7

Thank you for joining our 75th anniversary celebration today, indulging us as we reminisced about what makes Monmouth Civic Chorus so special, and listening to some of our favorite songs in this beautiful church with its wonderful acoustic.

We hope this performance has given you the same joy that we've experienced by singing it for you.

Although MCC remains one amazing musical organization, it's been comprised over the years of hundreds of unique individuals, from diverse backgrounds, each with their own special sound.

Creating beautiful choral music involves harnessing these 100 diverse voices, engaging each of them to listen to one another while simultaneously interpreting the composer's score to summon the resplendent sounds that transport us all. We hope that has been achieved here today.

Before we sing our final number, we'd like to make you aware of a remarkable truth about our MCC membership.

Inclusivity and camaraderie have, from the very beginning, been core values of MCC. We treasure the way diverse voices deepen our richness of sound. We pride ourselves on the way our camaraderie fosters the long-term commitments to the chorus that allow us to develop *cumulative* musical skills.

Chorus, as we rise to deliver our final number I would like you to stand according to your years of membership in the chorus: 50 or more years, 40 or more, 30 or more, 20 or more, 10 or more, 5 or more and, perhaps most importantly for the 100th anniversary celebration, those of you who joined within the last 5 years.

Again thank you for coming today and enjoy this last selection, from "Ragtime".

Ryan, they are all yours.