

Brian Bartoldus

Handel Choir Artistic Director and Conductor

BY CARYN R. SAGAL



Brian Bartoldus has been drawn to music since infancy — rocking out in the playpen situated beside the family piano. At age 4, he taught himself the intro to Liszt’s “Hungarian Rhapsody” after repeatedly hearing it performed in a “Tom and Jerry” cartoon. He started taking piano lessons soon after, and grew up enjoying classical music on the radio.

“Blown away” after seeing The Washington Chorus perform Dvorak’s “Stabat Mater” at the Kennedy Center, Bartoldus abandoned his plans to study civil engineering at Johns Hopkins University — opting for composition, organ and conducting at Shenandoah University before earning his DMA in choral conducting from Yale University.

His career has taken him from featured soloist with the Frederick Symphony Orchestra and the Mount St. Mary’s Camerata, to serving as artistic director of the Third Practice professional vocal ensemble, arranging works for the Washington Master Chorale and composing for The

Washington Chorus, City Choir of Washington and Ensemble vOkabile (Hamburg, Germany).

He also is on the adjunct faculty at Mount St. Mary’s University and an active lecturer and clinician, presenting throughout America and England on subjects ranging from Gregorian chant to late 20th-century masterworks.

In 2017, Bartoldus took the baton as artistic director and conductor of the Handel Choir of Baltimore — a critically acclaimed choral ensemble that presents annual performances of Handel’s “Messiah” with the Handel Period Instrument Orchestra, as well as other major choral and choral-orchestral works. In addition to its subscription concerts, Handel Choir regularly performs at civic events, educational programs, concert series and retirement communities.

“For nine decades, Handel Choir of Baltimore has been Baltimore’s premier Baroque choir, creating high-caliber choral experiences that engage our singers in the power of collective

music making and inspire and uplift our audiences,” Bartoldus says. “But we don’t just do Baroque music! Our tagline is ‘Baroque and Beyond,’ and we commission and premiere the newest works from Baltimore and around the world.”

On May 17, Handel Choir will conclude its 90th anniversary season by performing Beethoven’s “Missa Solemnis” “with the largest period instrument orchestra the city has ever seen — all under the spectacular acoustics of the Baltimore Basilica’s grand dome,” Bartoldus explains. “This will be Baltimore’s first performance of this monumental work in over three decades, and I can’t tell you how excited I am to share this with the city!”

Beyond that, Bartoldus says, “several major commissions are coming down the pike, as well as beloved masterworks by Bernstein and Fauré. Our 100th anniversary will coincide with Handel’s 350th birthday, so I’m pretty certain there will be a lot of music by our namesake composer in 2035!”

He also anticipates more collaborations with local arts organizations, noting: “we’ve had the privilege of sharing the stage with the BSO, students from Baltimore Polytechnic and UMBC, jazz vocalist Keith Snipes, Peabody faculty cellist Amit Peled, light projection artist Jason Charney, Steinway artist Lura Johnson, and many others during the last five years. I want to widen our circle as much as we can, and experience a new and wonderful art that we couldn’t make on our own.”

Overall, Bartoldus looks forward to “sharing a lot more music with Handel Choir orchestra members, choristers and audiences — particularly amazing music that they’ve never heard before.”

For more information about Handel Choir and its upcoming performances, visit handelchoir.org. □

CARYN R. SAGAL IS A BALTIMORE-BASED FREELANCE WRITER.