



Christine Gevert, Founding Artistic Director

Crescendo Inc. • PO Box 245 • Lakeville CT 06039 860-435-4866 • www.WorldClassMusic.org

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10 St. James Avenue, 3rd Floor
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To Whom It May Concern,

This letter is in support of Saint James Place organization and includes our declaration of intent for performing at that venue starting 2016.

Who is Crescendo?

Founded in Lakeville, Connecticut by Christine Gevert and a group of committed amateur musicians at the end of 2003, over the course of ten years the organization has grown from an expanded music program at Trinity Church Lime Rock to what is now, an award-winning, nationally-recognized performance organization that presents concerts in the tri-state area of northwest Connecticut, western Massachusetts and New York's mid-Hudson Valley. Its spring and fall programs are currently performed in both Lakeville and Great Barrington, MA. This year the organization also performed at Bard College's Chapel of the Holy Innocents and St. Bart's Chapel in New York City.

Crescendo's musical mission is to give listeners and performers classical music experiences that are emotionally alive and personally meaningful. Its special emphasis on historically informed performance practice distinguishes Crescendo from other concert choruses in this area.

Still hosted by Trinity Church today, Crescendo's music programs are mostly produced by its own ensembles in Lakeville, CT and Great Barrington, MA: The Crescendo Chorus, the Vocal Ensemble, the Baroque Ensemble and the Crescendo Period Instrument Orchestra. Nationally and internationally recognized soloists and period instrument players now bring Crescendo's performances to a level comparable to those of the best ensembles in the country.

Crescendo puts great emphasis on educational outreach – to singers, audiences and students. Talented local high school singers are coached by Ms. Gevert and often play

a part in our performances. She and members of the chorus visit local schools each year to work with students. Crescendo also offers workshops and master classes, community lectures and for its audiences, pre-concert talks and informative program notes.

Crescendo has produced over 50 concert programs over the last ten years. Generally two large choral concerts (performed twice always - in MA with a repeat in CT) and several smaller chamber music concerts per season. In addition to that there has been a variable number of talks, workshops, masterclasses, outreach and educational school performances every year. Last year Crescendo reached around 1500 audience members with their events.

Ms. Gevert is celebrated for her innovative approach to programming and performance. In June 2014, Crescendo, under her leadership, won the prestigious Chorus America/ASCAP Alice Parker Award presented in Washington DC. She has introduced Crescendo's audiences to eight U.S. premiers as well as a diverse repertoire of contemporary and early music. Among the many:

- The U.S. premiere of a mass, *Misa Andina*, by the contemporary Chilean composer, Jaime Soto León and, in the same concert, a cappella works by the young Norwegian-American composer Ola Gjeillo.
- Commissions of two works by composers of Chinese music, Cheng-Chia Wu and John Myers, and contemporary Chinese a cappella works by the acclaimed composer Chen Yi.
- The U.S. premiere of the 17th century Bohemian composer Jan Dismas Zelenka's *Missa Votiva*.
- The U.S. Premiere of the oratorio *Kapitänsmusik* by Georg Philipp Telemann.
- A 2006 concert featuring *To Hope*, the late Dave Brubeck's jazz mass, which was acclaimed both by its audiences and the composer.
- The concert "*Orlando di Lasso's Sibylline Prophecies, 20th Century Music Foretold*," presenting a rarely-heard, transformational jewel of the 16th century.
- The November 2014 concert program featuring works by Domenico Zipoli, a 18th century Italian composer and organist who spent the last years of his life as a Jesuit missionary in Argentina. His work in South America was thought to be lost, but was discovered in an abandoned church in Bolivia in the 1980's.

Ms. Gevert has been among the first to explore works from countries whose rich musical traditions are still unfamiliar to U.S. audiences:

- Poland's classical music has not been widely disseminated due mostly to its centuries-long political turmoil. After Crescendo's 2009 tribute to the life of the famed Polish harpsichordist, Wanda Landowska, Ms. Gevert was invited to perform a harpsichord recital in Poland in Landowska's honor. While there, she collected a wealth of Polish Baroque masterpieces, many never heard by U.S. audiences. The result was Crescendo's fall 2012 concert that featured the U.S. premiere of the Polish Baroque composer Bartolomiej Pekieli's magnificent mass, *La Lombardesca*.
- Ms. Gevert's Latin American heritage found its first musical expression with Crescendo in the 2006 performance of *Misa Criolla* by the late Argentinian composer Ariel Ramírez. There followed a 2010 celebration of Latin American music from the Colonial Baroque to contemporary times in the concert

“Hidden Treasures of Latin American Choral Music” and a 2011 concert *“Mille Regretz,”* illuminating the wealth of Renaissance polychoral music in Spain and Latin America. Last year Crescendo and a group of Andean musicians gave the U.S. Premiere of the contemporary composer Jaime Soto León's *Misa Andina*.

- Crescendo's programming has also been at the cutting edge of our time with music projects that are a fusion of styles such as *“Gesualdo and Jazz,”* a concert of 16th century composer Carlo Gesualdo's Tenebrae motets accompanied by contemporary saxophone improvisation. Another concert made use of innovative multimedia: In 2007, Hugo Distler's *Totentanz* was performed with chorus, modern dance, narration and projected animation. A film was made of this performance and shown as a main feature at a European conference of Art Macabre at the Max Planck institute in Florence, Italy in 2008.

Crescendo's dedicated singers are residents of local area towns as are our board members and our founder. When she started Crescendo, Ms. Gevert envisioned a program that would include both music and community involvement, where amateurs endeavor to sing to professional standards. Each successful project opened the doors for more recognition and reach. Through ten years of dedication and hard work, Crescendo has become a music organization that is not just locally, but also nationally respected. It is an important part of the cultural fabric of the tri-state community it serves.

Crescendo's plans for the future

Crescendo plans to grow our concert season over the next three years by adding a choral concert and several chamber music concerts and also offering more talks about our repertoire and its background. This expansion will concentrate on our main venues in Great Barrington and Lakeville, but we will also perform more in New York City. We want to do more in Great Barrington, which is the center of a large and enthusiastic audience for the kind of repertoire that we offer. The population density in southern Berkshire county is much greater than in the northwest corner of Connecticut. The many performing arts festivals there, such as Tanglewood, the Berkshire Choral Festival, Shakespeare and Company, and others, and an arts-centered community extending from Simon's Rock of Bard College and the Steiner School in Great Barrington to Mass MOCA and Williams College in the north have created a substantial classical music audience.

Inadequacy of Crescendo's current performance spaces

Our principal venues for large choral performances are Trinity Church Lime Rock in Lakeville, CT and First Congregational Church in Great Barrington, MA. For smaller chamber music performances, we have used private homes and barns and the local library, but only in the Lakeville, CT area. The church in Great Barrington seats approximately 300 people, and the Lakeville church seats 175. Both venues have reasonably good acoustics, but they are not ideal for our performances. The Lakeville venue is too small, both for the audience and for the performers. We sell out regularly

days before the performance and have to turn away audience members. The performance space barely fits our ensemble. The Great Barrington venue is also not ideal. It is not used as a concert venue other than for our two performances and a yearly Messiah 'sing-along'. Thus, Crescendo is not associated with a regular concert or performance space in Great Barrington. As a result, even after eight years of performing in town we are not well known in the area. The performance space at that church is very difficult to use. An immovable altar separates the instrumentalists from the choir, which must be positioned about four feet higher than the instruments, while some singers need to stand on steps. To make this venue work for our ensemble, we have built a heavy custom fit platform for the instruments and the choir, which requires a very labor intensive set up and break down. The rental costs of both venues are low, but the labor cost for set up and the amount of time that our volunteers have to work to prepare them for a performance are not ideal for us.

Crescendo's plans for performing at Saint James Place

Crescendo is at a point in its development that requires more visibility and a better performance venue to support growth. The Lakeville area has no performance space that would support expansion. To tap into the potential audience in the Great Barrington area, we need a place where could offer concerts and lectures right in the center of town. It should be close to our current venue, so we can build on the audience that we have developed over the last eight years. The other principal large performance area, the Mahaiwe Theatre, is too expensive for us, and its acoustic is not good for classical unamplified music.

Crescendo performed twice at the former St. James church in 2006. Even with the limitations of the stage and backstage facilities it was already a very good performance space. We had large audiences, as the church was already known for other high level performances by groups such as Aston Magna, Berkshire Bach and others. We have seen the restoration of Saint James Place since its beginnings, and talked with Fred and Sally Harris and the marketing company they hired about what we would need, and what the place will have to offer. We are very pleased with the concept of Saint James Place and also with the design of the performance space and other rooms. We believe that this could become an ideal venue for midsize high quality performances in the area and with this for Crescendo's performances and talks.

For the 2016-17 season (between fall of 2016 and early summer of 2017) we plan to hold the following events at Saint James Place:

- Three large choral concerts, which for each would involve rental of the Sanctuary space for the performance at \$600, for a full rehearsal day at \$300, and for a stage check on concert day for \$100-150; in addition, there would be a reception in the Great Hall after two of the concerts, at \$300 each.
- Three chamber music concerts, two of them in the Sanctuary and one of them in a smaller hall, with three to four hours of rehearsal time for each.
- Four talks in the Great Hall, for \$300 each.

Saint James Place as a vital cultural resource

We believe that the Saint James Place project is of great value to the larger Great Barrington area. The excellent acoustics and architectural qualities of the building, its historical significance, its record as a performance venue for good classical music, and the vision of Sally and Fred Harris to present culturally and intellectually high quality performances will make it an important cultural destination for the area. The vision, care and determination that Sally and Fred Harris have shown in the process of restoring Saint James Place is exceptional and deserves the support that is needed to conclude this extraordinary project.

Sincerely,



Richard Vreeland II
President of Crescendo



Christine Gevert
Founding Artistic Director