

Soli Deo Gloria Founders: Judith and Ken Westcott



Soli Deo Gloria co-founder Judith Westcott.

Judith Westcott, along with her husband Ken (now deceased), are the founders of Soli Deo Gloria Choir. Judith holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music from Trenton State College, Trenton, New Jersey. She received her Master of Music degree from the prestigious Esther Boyer College of Music, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Ms. Westcott then spent several years performing at the University of Pennsylvania.

Judy hosted the first Festival of English Choral Music in Colorado Springs (1989). She is the former Director of the UCCS Concert Choir and has extensive teaching experience in choral and instrumental music in public schools. Judy is currently employed as Organist / Choir Director of St. Raphael's Episcopal Church. She is also the director of Abbey Singers, a small choral ensemble in the English style, as well as instructor in Choral Music at UCCS.

A Detailed History of Soli Deo Gloria Choir

1973 - 1986

Some musicians may recognize 'Soli Deo Gloria' as the signature phrase of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) who concluded all his manuscripts with the initials "S.D.G." In the very beginning, the choir had no name. In the fall of 1973, Bethany Lutheran Church was asked to provide the music for the Annual Lutheran Reformation Service to be held on the Colorado College Campus at Shove Chapel. The choir director at Bethany, Judith Westcott, established a community choir using Bethany's

choir as a nucleus, augmented by church singers of various denominations. That December, on the first Sunday of Advent, the choir performed the Christmas portion of Handel's *Messiah* at Shove Chapel. Because of the joy members found in being part of a community choir, they decided they wanted to become a permanent, nondenominational choir. One founding member Irma Borgen, Latin teacher and musician, suggested the name "Soli Deo Gloria," which means, "To God Alone Be Glory," and the name was unanimously adopted by the membership.

K. Kenneth Westcott served as director with Judith Westcott as assistant director and accompanist through the spring of 1986. Soli also owes a great deal to Dr. J. Julius Baird for providing encouragement, rehearsal space, and concert venues during the early years. Soli has traditionally sung in church sanctuaries throughout our history, although several performances have been held at the Pikes Peak Center.

Mr. Westcott envisioned a community choir with the musical range that would not only perform the great choral masterpieces with orchestra, but that also would freely provide those masterpieces to the community, thereby enriching both performers and audience. The breadth of that community grew when in 1980 the choir raised over eighteen thousand dollars to send fifty-four members to Washington, DC to perform as part of President Ronald Reagan's first inaugural festivities. In 1982, the choir performed with the Colorado Springs Symphony at the July 4th Celebration in Memorial Park. In 1986, at the Pikes Peak Center, the choir participated with other choral groups in the production of *America!*, a celebration of the bicentennial signing of the Constitution.

Some of the major works presented under Mr. Westcott's guidance included **The Passion According to St. John** and **Magnificat** by Johann Sebastian Bach, **A German Requiem** by Johannes Brahms, **Mass in E Minor** by Anton Bruckner, **St. Nicolas** by Benjamin Britten, **Requiem** by Gabriel Fauré, **The Hymn of Jesus** by Gustav Holst, **Great Mass in C Minor** and **Requiem** by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Under Mr. Westcott's direction, the Choir also presented the complete *Messiah* by George Frideric Handel several times with members of the Colorado Springs Symphony.

1986 - 1994

In 1986, Anna Hamre became director and remained for eight years with Calvin Rogers

directing for one year while Dr. Hamre took sabbatical leave. Some of the major works presented under Dr. Hamre's guidance included **Gloria** and **Requiem** by John Rutter, **Lord Nelson Mass** and **Creation** by Joseph Haydn, **Elijah** by Felix Mendelssohn, **Mass in Honor of the Eucharist** by Norman Dello Joio, **Rejoice in the Lamb** by Benjamin Britten, **Cantata 142** by Johann Sebastian Bach, and **Chichester Psalms** by Leonard Bernstein.

In the fall of 1991, Soli Deo Gloria Choir became a prominent part of the City of Colorado Springs' "Festival of Lights" with a performance of Bach's **Magnificat**. In 1993, the choir again performed with the Colorado Springs Symphony at the July 4th Celebration in Memorial Park.

1994 - 1998

In the fall of 1994, Edmund Ladouceur became director of Soli Deo Gloria. During the five years of his leadership the choir grew to 160 members. Also during his tenure, the choir repeated its performance of **Handel's Messiah** as a part of its 25th Anniversary celebration. Soli Deo Gloria Choir had the honor during this period to collaborate twice with the Colorado Springs Symphony and the Colorado Springs Chorale in their productions of Mahler's **Symphony No. 2 (Resurrection)** in May 1998 and Verdi's **Requiem** in May 1999. In February 1999, Soli gave its first Hymn Festival at the First United Methodist Church. Some of the other major works presented under Mr. Ladouceur's direction included **King David** by Arthur Honegger, **Requiem** by Gabriel Fauré, **A German Requiem** by Johannes Brahms, **Gloria** by Antonio Vivaldi, **Testament of Freedom** by Randall Thompson, **In Terra Pax** by Gerald Finzi, and **Dona Nobis Pacem** by Ralph Vaughan Williams.

1999 - 2001

From 1999 to 2001, Robert Crowder directed Soli. Large works included Lauridsen's **Lux Aeterna**, Stravinsky's **Symphony of Psalms**, Holst's **The Hymn of Jesus, Op. 37**, and Poulenc's **Gloria**. Soli Deo Gloria Choir joined with the Colorado Springs Symphony and Colorado Springs Chorale again in May of 1999 for Verdi's **Requiem**. In December of the same year, the choir was privileged to sing with the Pueblo Symphony in Colorado Springs and Pueblo.

In May of 2000, Soli was invited and honored to participate as the guest choir with the Air Force Band of the Rockies' **Stars and Stripes Forever** concert at the Pikes Peak

Center as part of the annual celebration of Armed Forces Week.

2001 - 2010

Brad Peterson became director of Soli Deo Gloria in September 2001. Soli was honored at the 2002 Colorado Springs Music Awards as "Best Vocal Group/Classical." In May 2003, Soli Deo Gloria traveled to New York City to sing the **Mozart Requiem** at Carnegie Hall under the direction of John Rutter. Soli celebrated its 30th anniversary with a gala performance of Schubert's **Mass in G Minor** and Mozart's **Requiem**. In December 2007, Soli Deo Gloria had the honor of performing the Colorado premiere of R. Douglas Helvering's **Gloria** with the composer present.

Other major works presented under Mr. Peterson's guidance include **Magnificat** by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, **Requiem** by Luigi Cherubini, **Gloria** by John Rutter, **Requiem** by Maurice Duruflé, **Mass in Time of War** by Joseph Haydn, **Solemn Vespers, Te Deum**, and **Piccolomini Mass** by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, **Five Christmas Carols** by Robert Millett, **Magnificat** by Gerald Finzi, and **Missa Festiva** by John Leavitt.

2010 - 2011

The concerts under Ray Killian's directorship were met with great reviews. The major works presented included **Gloria** by Antonio Vivaldi, accompanied by a small orchestra, and **Christmas Cantata (sinfonia sacra)** by Daniel Pinkham accompanied by brass and organ.

September 2011 - December 2011

We gratefully recognize and appreciate Ed Ladoceur for stepping up to conduct Soli Deo Gloria and providing us his excellent leadership once again.

January 2012 - May 2017

Gary DeKler brought a unique background to Soli Deo Gloria having performed as a jazz musician as well as music director for St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Colorado Springs, the director of the Catholic music programs for the Air Force Academy Cadet Chapel, and director of the Roman Catholic Chamber Choir of Colorado Springs.

February, 1 2017

The BBC program, Great American Railroad Journeys S02 - Ep08, featured the Soli

Deo Gloria Choir singing *America the Beautiful* on the steps of the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum. Click [HERE](#) to view a copy of the broadcast.

September 2017 - present

We are excited to have Nathaniel Voelker as our Conductor and Artistic Director. He brings a rich heritage and a heart that loves people and singing. SDG Choir has experienced growth in membership and in youthful singers since Nate joined us and started a scholarship program for full time high school and undergraduate students to sing with Soli Deo Gloria Choir. In December of 2018 SDG Choir participated as Nate conducted a choir of roughly 150 in performance with Irish artists Keith and Kristyn Getty and special guest Ricky Skaggs at the Pike's Peak Center. In 2019 SDG Choir offered the Colorado premiere of Patrick Wickliffe's Gloria and the world premiere of Sandi Padilla's *Born in Bethlehem*. In 2020 SDG Choir was scheduled to offer the world premiere of Wickliffe's Psalm 62, commissioned by SDG Choir, and tour to Salzburg, Vienna, and Prague. Both were unfortunately canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic hiatus of 2020/2021, Nate organized and led online interview and lecture series' featuring lead singers from the Metropolitan Opera, Grammy award winning conductors, and composers on the rise, and a journey through choral Requiem compositions in historical succession, with the exception of the final lecture. The Fauré Requiem was the final lecture as that was the piece being rehearsed when the pandemic shut down the season. Reemerging from COVID in the summer of 2021, SDG Choir offered the first Summer Sing, a concert in one rehearsal. In the Fall of 2021 SDG choir was cautiously back and sang in concert with guest vocalists Amber Lurz and Alexandre Lira. In the Spring of 2022 SDG choir returned to the Fauré Requiem performing in Colorado Springs and Fort Collins in memory of Dr. Robert Molison, former Director of Choral Activities Colorado State University and Iowa State University. Since the Fall of 2022 SDG Choir has been in residence at First Lutheran Church Colorado Springs.

While a background in singing and music literacy is very helpful, SDG Choir is open to all, and you are invited!