

## ENTERTAINMENT

# Cantabile's Boulder opener a nod to American choral heritage

New director Brian Stone makes debut with program

By *Kelly Dean Hansen*

For *A&E Spotlight*

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The Cantabile singers in 2015. (Darcy V. Kitching / Courtesy Cantabile)

### If you go

**What:** The Cantabile Singers open their 2016-17 concert season with "Choral Heritage of the United States."

**When:** 2 p.m. Sunday

**Where:** First Congregational Church, 1128 Pine St., Boulder

**Cost:** \$15 Boulder (\$13 senior, \$5 student).

**More info:** 720-204- 8806 or [cantabilesingers.org](http://cantabilesingers.org)  
(<http://cantabilesingers.org/tickets/>)

### Further Cantabile Concerts:

- "Winter's Passing," 7 p.m. Feb. 3, 2017, Stewart Auditorium, 400 Quail Road, Longmont and 2 p.m. Feb. 5, First Congregational Church.
- "Chichester Psalms," 7 p.m. May 5 and 2 p.m. May 7, First Congregational Church.

Among Boulder's numerous choral ensembles, [the Cantabile Singers](http://cantabilesingers.org/tickets/) (<http://cantabilesingers.org/tickets/>) have always occupied an interesting niche. Cantabile is a community choir, but on a smaller scale than the Boulder Chorale and more akin to that ensemble's chamber subgroup. Its singers are polished and experienced, and there is a continual push for quality both in performance and repertoire. The three-concert season typically opens with a diverse but thematic program and closes with one centered on a larger-scale, but still modest, classical masterwork.

While Cantabile has stability among its personnel and especially its excellent accompanist, Stella Pradeau, the director's chair has been a revolving door of late. Alejandro Gómez Guillén, director since 2010, departed with a much-heralded Mozart mass in 2014, and then the vivacious Hannah Wunsch took over that fall. Wunsch left after one year, and so did her interim successor, Paul Thompson.

Directing Cantabile is an ideal position for  
standout graduate students in choral

conducting, yet greener pastures in the form of tenure-track positions typically await such talents.

But Brian Stone, who makes his debut with a program that was played last Sunday in Estes Park and will be repeated on Sunday in Boulder at First Congregational Church, has a long connection to Colorado. He arrived in Boulder from the Pacific Northwest in 2008 and obtained his master's degree in choral conducting from University of Colorado Boulder. Since then, he has taught for public high schools in Grand Junction and Denver but recently decided to pursue a new career. He just returned to CU to pursue his doctorate under choral department head Greg Gentry.

"After returning to the university, I really wanted to continue with outside work," Stone said, "and I've always thought highly of Cantabile. They have a place for amateur and experienced singers, but they are always mindful about striving for the best performances."

### Three concerts of American music

All three concerts this season center on American music or composers. This week's opener is dedicated to the choral heritage of the United States.

"Cantabile's concerts tend to fall at unusual times," Stone said. "They don't do a typical December holiday concert, so the November concert allows for a lot of freedom."

Wanting to make his debut topical, and knowing that it would fall within days of the U.S. election, Stone decided to put the program in that context.

"As taxing as the election season has been, I decided to assemble a program of music that can give us optimism about our country, whatever the result," Stone said. "And American choral music is as diverse as the history and people of our nation."

The starting point is the anthem "Chester" by the first great American choral composer, William Billings, who died in 1800 when the nation was in its infancy, wrote "Chester" during the Revolutionary War, and it actually served as an unofficial national anthem long before "The Star-Spangled Banner" was officially adopted in 1931.

"I found myself going down several alleys when looking at American choral music, and I decided to give a good cross-section," Stone said.

In addition to colonial "classical" music from Billings and his contemporaries, he also includes some Native American music, folk songs and spirituals on the first half of the concert. The second half explores jazz arrangements, touches on Cole Porter and George Gershwin, and closes with three pieces by that most quintessentially American classical composer, Aaron Copland — "Zion's Walls," "Lark" and "The Promise of Living" (the latter from his opera "The Tender Land").

The second program is planned for Feb. 3, 2017, at Longmont's Stewart Auditorium, at the Longmont Museum, and Feb. 5 in Boulder. The program is called "Winter's Passing." Stone explained that he wanted to do a seasonal concert that was not a holiday concert. "I looked into pieces with wintry texts," he said.

The obvious centerpiece was the beautiful cycle "Mid-Winter Songs," written in 1980 by American composer Morten Lauridsen. Songs by 20th century German master Paul Hindemith are also featured. The second half of the program will move into spring-themed songs.

Stone said that the February concert is also meant to showcase the talents of Pradeau, whom he calls "a phenomenal, consummate professional." Most of the concert will feature sophisticated and challenging piano accompaniments (such as that in the Lauridsen work), and very little a cappella singing.

Cantabile's season closes May 5 and 7, with both dates in Boulder. As usual for this concert, it is built around a larger masterpiece, in this case Leonard Bernstein's 1965 "Chichester Psalms."



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Brian Stone made his debut as director of Cantabile with a concert on Sunday in Estes Park. (Cantabile / Courtesy photo)

The three-movement work is sung in Hebrew and was originally scored for full orchestra and choir. Cantabile will perform it in Bernstein's chamber arrangement for organ, harp and percussion. Stone will balance the concert with other settings (in other languages) of the same psalms used by Bernstein.

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