John Bertalot's LAST CHRISTMAS NEWSLETTER, July 1998

Last Christmas because it should have been sent Last Christmas, and Last Newsletter because I'm retiring (Retiring!) to England, and will no longer be able to afford to print and mail 1,000 copies to friends all over the world!

BUT I shall be able to keep in even closer touch with you, IF you're "on Line", or if you know someone who is. See back page!

THE PRINCETON SINGERS & Alums

immediately before my final concert with them in Princeton University Chapel, Saturday, 6th June, '98



The packed audience gave us three standing ovations! A record!

Here comes At-Leasta-Thrilla-Month since my last Newsletter. Make the most of your last dose, dear Newsletter addicts!

September 1996

THRILL 1 My Princeton Singers returned to the US euphoric (warm fuzzy feelings) after their 2-week UK August tour - highlights of which were staying with wonderful hosts in Northampton and Blackburn and recitals to standing-room audiences in Blackburn Cathedral (to celebrate the 1.400th anniversary of the building of the first church on that site!) and in the Chapel of King's College, Cambridge, when the College had bought brand new chairs for the audience. My college, Corpus Christi, had entertained us and hundreds of distinguished guests not only to lunch, but also to a delicious buffet supper afterwards. Whatta Day!

THRILL 2 Bunny Ashley Botha brought his fabulous Drakensberg Boys Choir from South Africa to give a concert in Princeton. Their singing was beyond belief. I've enjoyed the privilege of conducting them three times in South Africa, but their standard of singing was now out of sight! Bunny and his colleagues encouraged them to spectacular heights of enthusiasm which could barely be contained One boy, for example, sang Mozart's Queen of the Night aria which not even Maria Callas could have improved on!



October

THRILL 3 Trinity's choir of men, boys and senior girls (= MBG) sang in Washington National Cathedral—but first we saw the amazing AIDS quilts laid out on The Mall - they covered the an area equivalent to 48 football pitches, and each one was made by a friend in memory of a friend who had died from AIDS. The crowds walked around silently, as though in church, to gaze at each one. It was a most moving experience.

Then we sang a concert in the Cathedral, followed by Choral Evensong when we combined with the cathedral choir. I conducted Howells' St. Paul's Mag & Nunc and nearly took off!

THRILL 4 Then I returned to Princeton to have my prostate cut out (cancer). When I was released from hospital - having been in the hands of the finest surgeon between Philadelphia and New York - Dr. Antony Vaselli - who saved my life, I was looked after by Robbie Ellsworth, music secretary at Trinity and wonderful friend, who nursed me back to health, even though her own spectacular house was being enlarged.



Robbie & son John outside their new house

November
NO THRILL. Watching TV all
day to aid recuperation!

December

THRILL 5 Spending 5 days in Walt Disney World in Florida where I really did recuperate. It's a fabulous place-exactly right for families or singles, young or old. I've been there twice before and could easily go again. Everything is superabundently efficient. There are millions of lights everywhere, and not one bulb is faulty. I rode in the driver's cabin of the monorail and asked how often the trains were serviced, expecting the answer "One a month!" But, no, "Every night!" Wow!

THRILL 6 Returned to Trinity after nearly three months' absence to find the choirs in tip top form, thanks to Associate Choirmaster Robert Palmer, Associate Organist Scott Dettra and a host of wonderful folk who rallied round to ensure that everything was as it should be. I was mightily impressed!

THRILL 7 Godson Christopher Hunwick called me on Christmas Day from England to tell me that he'd just been accepted to read Classics at Lincoln College Oxford. My joy knew no bounds. Whatta Christmas present! Congratulations. (See next paragraph!)

January, 1997

writing from John Le Carre, who was a near contemporary of mine at Lincoln College, Oxford. "There has to be external conflict in story telling. "The cat sat on the mat" has no conflict, but "The cat sat on the dog's mat" has!"

Notice in a church bulletin: 'The United Methodist Women have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the church basement this Friday!

Extracts from friends' Christmas cards:

- 1 Michaelangelo's David [in Florence] has the most sensuous bottom our daughter has ever seen!
- 2 Our ski mountain, an active volcano, erupted this year so we opted for a holiday in Fiji
- 3 Gluttony and sybaritic self indulgence has as ever been our lot!
- 4 I was sworn in as a Judge in the Supreme Court a few months after having a triple bypass!
- Our 9-year old has begun New Testament Greek and our 11-year old is keeping up his Hebrew! (Two of my Princeton boys, obviously!)

February

THRILL 8 Greg Smith, one of Trinity's supa basses, had given us a set of Dyson in D Mag & Nunc. When we sang them I invited his distinguished son, Dr. Freeman Dyson to be present. His daughter was head girl at Trinity when I first came and his father, Sir George, was Director of the Royal College of Music when I was a student there! I asked Freeman for his definition of the second law of thermodynamics (for I was incorporating it into my third book - How to be a Successful Choral Director and still be an Effective Christian!) He said two words: "Entropy Increases!" That's all I needed. Thanx!

THRILL 9 George Gallup, who lives in Princeton, carried out a survey for Trinity Church to discover what parishioners liked. Guess what came top of the list? Music! This had far-reaching consequences, for it had been proposed that an interim music director be appointed after I retired, but now the Rector agreed that a permanent replacement should be found. The great Search Machine slowly began to swing into action!

THRILLS 10 Benita Ryan, fabulous choir parent, agreed to take on the chairmanship for the visit of King's College Choir, Cambridge, next September. We breathed a corporate sigh of relief, for Benita is astonishingly efficient. We aimed to raise \$37,000! (Their fee is \$15,000.) All profits to the music program!

THRILL 11 Robert Palmer threw a party for Trinity's Adult Choir to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the death of Ockegham! It all happens at Trinity!

Began writing my Third Book, at THRILL 12 the request of Augsburg Fortress. Completed the first two chapters in one day. Great!

March

THRILL 13 Conducted a performance of Verdi's Requiem in Princeton - in one go with no 3 the British election results beamed across

rehearsal - chorus, orchestra and superb soloists. This is what Princeton is all about!

THRILLS 14 & 15 Had visits from Carol Carver (I/c music publishing at Augsburg Fortress) and from Lynn Sengstack and Krista Montgomery (directors of Shawnee Press) within a few days of each other. I felt duly honored that they should drop in on me, for both publish a fair chunk of my books and music!

MAJOR NEWS John Major announced a general election in the UK for May 1st.

THRILL 16 Two grad students and their professor came from the Institute of Sacred Music at Yale to watch my rehearsals. Apparently my two books on choirtraining are required reading for the Master's program at Yale. They came to see if what I wrote was true. It was!

THRILL 17 One of the young men in my choir told me that he was so keen on singing at Trinity that he had given up 68 games of hockey in the last few years to attend our practices and services! Thanks, Greg!

UNBELIEVABLE QUOTE from Oxford Today. the Oxford University magazine: "An electron beam, only 2 atoms in diameter, can transcribe all 29 volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica on to the head of a pin!"

April

THRILL 18 Received an invitation to attend the first Benefactors' Dinner next November at Corpus, Cambridge. Tails, decorations and doctors' robes may be worn. (OK for the first one, but not, alas the last two!)

FIT RELATIONS Cousin Shella called me from England to say that she'd just taken her small grandsons to a water park and went on the waterslide with them (!) Afterwards one of them

said, "Gran, you're wrinkled but fit!" THRILL 19 The Rector appointed two illustrious choirparents as co-chairs of the Search Committee for my successor: Joe Mahon, a distinguished attorney, and Kathy Rohrer. Dean at Princeton University, who, with her husband, John Sully and daughter, Clare, all sing in my choir at Trinity. Eventually the committee numbered 18 influential folk, parishioners, choir parents, adult singers and two teenager singers who all worked incredibly hard for 12 months sifting applications from as far away as France, New Zealand and Australia, as well, of course, as a galaxy of talent from the US! It's no secret now (July '98) that no fewer than four English Cathedral organists applied - two of whom got onto the short list!

May

Watched continuous coverage of THRILL 20

th'Atlantic from the BBC. Tony and Cheri Blair were having a party, but John Major retired with tremendous dignity. Full marks all round!

INCLUSIVITY! Played for a wedding at Trinity

where, for the first time, the Best Man was a

woman, and the Matron of Honor was a man!

THRILL 21 Carol Carver called from Augsburg to say that two of my anthems, Amazing Grace and Come, Risen Lord would be included in their Book of Favorite Anthems which would be published next year. Wow! (Also during this time a number of my other compositions were accepted for publication by Augsburg and

Shawnee - no room to say more!) WHAT? Attended a meeting of the Worship Committee at Trinity. One of the members said that she didn't like the choir singing death cants!

THRILL 22 Was invited to The Queen's Birthday Garden Party in New York by Bill Miller, chairman of the St. Paul's Appeal in America. He'd persuaded me, last year, to join his Board and I relished the opportunity to rub shoulders with corporate business folk who Think Big. Bill invited a few of us to dinner after the party and, over cocktails, I asked one of my fellow guests what she did for a living. "Oh, I

juggle with \$500 million every day!" To top that,

Bill told me that his God-daughter had recently

been awarded 148 marks out of 150 for grade 8

DID I SAY THAT? At the end-of-season dinner for our MBG choir, choirman Daniel Zuckerman read out some of the bon mots I'd let slip during the season. (He writes them down immediately they escape!)

(When the men were throaty) Sounds like a tenor who has a frustrated love life!

(To cure tepid singing) God is not a boring

violin!

June

person. If He were, he wouldn't have made you! (Too loud!) Don't sound as though you were practicing to be a safety valve on the Queen

(Plainsong - very plain) Please don't sound like

monks who have, quite clearly, lost their voca-(For errors) They put down horses for less!

(To encourage thoughtful interpretation words) The seat of your enemy is the interesting part!

(To encourage attention) Would you imagine that you're talented! (To encourage a more confident approach):-

You're not only looking worried, you're looking worried in Greek!

(To encourage accuracy) Don't land near the note, land on it, or else you'll get wet! (To enliven fluffy singers) Basses, imagine that

you're cellos with a college degree! None of the above, needless to say, appears in

my How To Do It books! THRILL 23 My Princeton Singers recorded their 3rd CD - in 11/2 days in Princeton Theological College Chapel - opposite Trinity. It took us 3 1/2 hours to record Howells' Requiem! Other composers include Walford Davies, Samuel Bar-

ber and Gerald Finzl. Justin Bischof, from New York, who has recently started his own record company, (Ethereal), was the instigator of this, and our own John Baker, retired part-time Captain in the US Navy and very good friend from Trinity, was the recording engineer. We were pleased that we managed to make the CD so quickly - the last one (Christmas Carols) took us 6 months!

thedral. It was superb! Some 200 OCs there and the cathedral choirs were magnificently wonderful, under the leadership of Gordon Stewart who had been a choirtraining student of mine at the RNCM! His assistant, Ben Saunders, accompanied most musically and the Provost, David Frayne, welcomed us all with especial warmth. He was particularly welcoming to me, both privately and publicly, and I was greatly moved, for I would be returning to live in Blackburn, where I had been cathedral organist for 18 years, the following year. An emotional highlight for me was the singing, by the cathedral men and boys' choir, of the anthem I had composed for them

Come, Risen Lord. I was so moved by this that I

couldn't move for fully 5 minutes afterwards. I

was also inordinately proud of my Godson, Noel

Hunwick (brother of Chris) who was the superb

Head Chorister. Thank you all, most precious

THRILLS GALORE 1 Flew to England to attend

the National Federation of Cathedral Old Cho-

risters first Annual Reunion, at Blackburn Ca-

friends! I took the opportunity to go over my house (which I bought 4 years previously!) with a builder, Richard Chadwick, who lives round the corner. I wanted a lot doing to it—two new bathrooms (one for guests from America-book early) a sun room and lots more. My Blackburn hosts, Paul & Pam Hargreaves, were, as ever tremen-

dously helpful and supportive, as were Geoff & Sheila Heap, former cathedral choir parents, who live in the house where I used to live. I felt that, between us, we would come up with a great scheme, if my wallet would stand it! Needless to say, I stayed with cousins Sheila & Dick, in Reigate, and Joan & Llewellyn, in

London who, as ever, made me feel so very welcome. My favorite cousins are very special!

July

THRILL 24 Received, form John Scott, a copy of the new St. Paul's Cathedral Chant Book in which John has included two of my chants. It is a magnificent production printed on glossy paper with lots of historical notes. Fascinating stuff. A collector's item.

THRILL 25 My Princeton Singers sang at the opening service for the National Convention of the Episcopal Church, held in an enormous auditorium in Philadelphia. A congregation of 10,000! When Americans organize things, they organize them big!

August

FAX from Ralph Allwood, director of music at Eton, asking me how I stopped choristers from talking during rehearsals. Read my 3rd book! (But I'm sure he knows!) He was kind enough to invite me to come to see him when next in England. Yes!

FINISHED the first draft of Book 3! Now for revisions!

THRILL 26 Helped to lead a 4-day workshop for new music published by Shawnee Press. It was held in a University campus in an exquisite part of Pennsylvania, and I was blown away by the number of choirmasters who came - over 600 of them! I led my sessions as quasi choir practices, getting them to sit up straight and to pay attention—which they seemed to appreciate, for when I led workshops (along with the other leaders) there was standing room only for my sessions!

THRILLS GALORE 2 For my summer vacation I stayed with three sets of generous friends in California and New Mexico.

The first set, who live near Hollywood, took me to a concert in the **Hollywood Bowl**—a vast outside auditorium which holds 20,000 people. I was blown away!

The second set of friends took me to the new Getty Art Museum, which is wholly fabulous. We were mightily impressed by this new construction, built on the top of a hill overlooking Los Angeles, with priceless works from all over the world, and newly planted gardens which were beginning to break into bloom. One of my hosts is a former Mormon, who came to Los Angeles to convert the city to Mormonism, but found himself converted to Christianityl His account of his conversion and of the secrecy with which he had to plan his escape rivals a James Bond story. (That's why I can't reveal his name!)

My third hosts in Santa Fe were superabundently generous and drove me all over that most exquisite part of the world, which reminded me of South Africa. They live in a new adobe house in the middle of nowhere, with ceilings 12ft. high and a view of 6 mountain ranges. At night the barking of coyotes added to the out-of-this-word atmosphere and I fell in love with it all.

I WAS AWAKENED on August 31st by John Baker, who told me of the death of Princess Di-

September

The next week American TV was full of this news and gave it 100% coverage for days and weeks afterwards.

On the Saturday, I recorded the BBC relay, which all the world watched, and was moved beyond words by the amazing tributes of flowers and the outpouring of emotion by folk from all walks of life. A friend, who was there, told me that the flowers which covered the drive to Kensington Palace were 6ft. high!

When the cortege entered the Abbey and Big Ben immediately struck 11.00, one knew that this was to be a most special experience. Martin Neary's choirs were perfection, in their singing and in their timing. I faxed him the next day to offer him my congratulations and unbounded admiration. He was gracious enough to fax me back immediately to say Thank-youl

THRILL 27 The Choir of King's College Cambridge, with Stephen Cleobury, gave a fabulous recital in Princeton University Chapel to a packed audience, thanks to six months' untiring work by choir parents Benita Ryan, Robbie Ellsworth and many others. The Chapel authorities said that it was the best organized concert they'd ever experienced. Well done!

THRILL 28 Adult Choir Singers Jim & Ruth Thornton threw a delicious birthday party for me in their lovely Princeton home. I gave Ruth an Hibiscus plant which, thanks to her TLC, continues to bloom to this day, 10 months later!

THRILL 29 Was invited to the exquisite home of two Trinity parishioners who were hosting an evening for the Revd. David Griffith, whom I hadn't seen since he and I were on the staff of St. Matthew's, Northampton. 35 years before! David was on a lecture tour of the US, and he and Steve White, our host, collect historic prayer books. Steve actually allowed us to handle some of his priceless collection as David addressed us. That was a rare evening!

October

THRILL 28 Led a choral workshop in Memphis, TN, and saw the Mississippi River for the

first time. It's big!

THRILL 29 Jean Stephens, eminent Trinity parishioner and good friend, invited me to join her at the head table for a dinner in Princeton to host the National Conference of the English Speaking Union. (She's President of the Princeton branch!) The main speaker gave us a talk on the awful sin of bad grammar - highly entertaining, but most threatening. When my Princeton Singers sang for the Conference the next day, I pointed out that, in the setting of Loch Lomond by Vaughan Williams, one verse has "Where I and my true love" and the other verse has 'Where me and my true love'! We were hedging our bets!

THRILL 30 To New York for lunch with Andrew Shenton, former organist of St. Matthew's, Northampton, who is completing his doctorate at Harvard. He wanted to hear all about Trinity's music program, for he was interested in applying. I told him! It was a good meeting.

November

THRILL 31 Flew to England to enjoy an unparalleled dinner at Corpus, Cambridge, where tails, orders and doctors' robes were much in evidence. The Master, Professor Sir Tony Wrigley, welcomed us all right royally, and the librarian, Dr. Fred Ratcliffe, had laid on a superb exhibition of some of Corpus' rare books, including St. Augustine's Bible (6th century) which we were allowed to gaze upon, but not touch! It was a euphoric visit, and I was inordinately proud to be a member of such a college.

It was also a good time because I met, for the first time, Richard Tanner, organist of All Saints', Northampton, (the 'other' church in Northampton!) We had lunch in London, because he wanted to hear about the music posi-

tion at Trinity, so I told him!

THRILL 32 Back in Princeton we gave a mammoth concert in the University Chapel on 22nd - St. Cecilia's Day. My three church choirs and my Princeton Singers sang music to celebrate and to commemorate St. Cecilia, the 34th anniversary of the assassination of President Kennedy, the 50th anniversary of The Queen's wedding, the 300th anniversary of the first service in the new St. Paul's Cathedral. the 302nd anniversary of Purcell, and we also commemorated Princess Diana with her wedding anthem by Wm. Mathias and, of course, her funeral anthem by John Tavener. We made \$6,000.00 profit (thanks to tremendously hard work again by Robbie Ellsworth & Co.) half of which went to the St. Paul's Cathedral Appeal 6 in America (Bill Miller was pleased!) and the other half to Trinity's music program!

GOOD NEWS Robbie and Shawn Ellsworth adopted a baby daughter from Russia! They went to Russia to collect her and great was the rejoicing when she arrived on these shores. She's adorable and her name is Alyssa!

December

COINCIDENCE Trinity's Search process was well under way, but when they called Richard Tanner in Northampton for a conference call interview, he said, "Ten minutes ago I was offered Blackburn Cathedral!"

THRILL 33 On Christmas Day Robbie and Shawn Ellsworth gave me the most precious Christmas present imaginable: they asked me to

be Godfather to Alyssa! Yes!



Shawn, Robbie, Alyssa & JB

January 1998

THRILL 34a Invitation from Fred Swann to conduct his choir at the Crystal Cathedral, CA, next month on world-wide TV of my arrangement of Amazing Grace! Yes!

THRILL 35 Dinner with Ted & Benita Ryan in their lovely home in Pennsylvania (begun in 1684!) They always invite fascinating guests. This time it was Pulitzer prize winner Jonathan Weiner, who had written The Beak of the Finch. In honor of the occasion I wore a tle decorated with beaks of ducks!

THRILL 36 Choir family (especially Mom Gill, and elder daughter Penny) began to create web pages for Trinity: Gill made the church pages and Penny the choir pages. They're great. Take a look:

www.trinityprinceton.org

February THRILL 34b Spent the most idvilic four days in Los Angeles, staying with wonderful friends and conducting Fred Swann's superb 80-strong choir in my Amazing Grace. Dr. Robert Schuller welcomed me publicly and said I could come back any time! Fred was generous enough, afterwards, to say, "The choir raved



about you!" The following week it was televised around the world to 154 countries. Wow!

THRILL 36 The Search process for my successor was well under way. Six high-powered short-listed candidates, including two from England, came to be interviewed and to lead practices. They didn't realize it, but every singer, from the longest serving adult to the newest boy, was invited to assess each candidate by secret ballot! It was fascinating to watch six experienced and highly gifted musicians lead practices in six different ways. I, needless to say, kept right out of the process!

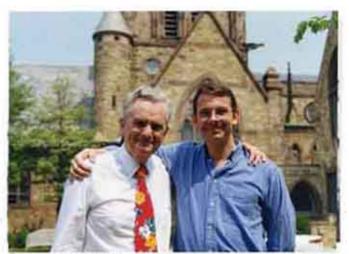
THRILL 37 The Princeton Singers corded their 4th CD, made up of their, and my, most favorite music. We made it on four successive Tuesday evenings and it went extraordinarily well. The Singers had inaugurated their own Search Process for their new conductor, and ended up with ten gifted short listed candidates. Again, I stayed right out of it!

March

THRILL 38 A letter arrived, out of the blue. from the President of Rider University, to offer me a doctorate of music! I floated six feet off the ground for weeks! Wow! The gracious letter concluded, "Previous honorary degree recipients have been Leonard Bernstein, William Mathias and Ricardo Muti. We look forward to awarding one to you as well." Wowee!

April

THRILLS 39a & bThe Rector told me that he had invited Dr. Andrew Shenton to succeed me at Trinity. He was the unanimous choice of Committee and choirs. I've known Andrew for 11 years and I couldn't be more thrilled, for he is has boundles enincredibly talented and ergy. And, of course, he was one of my successors at St. Matthew's, Northampton! Supa!



JB & Andrew Shenton outside Trinity

Shortly afterwards, the Princeton Singers announced that they had chosen Dr. Steven Samitz, professor of conducting at Lehigh Uni versity, to succeed me. Again, I was

greatly thrilled for he, too, is amazingly gifted and will lead the Singers into new and even

higher paths of achievement.

THRILL 40 My last Board meeting of the St. Paul's Cathedral Appeal in America. Bill Miller, chairman, held it on the 56th floor of the former PanAm Building in New York, from where we had breathtaking views down Park Avenue, with the Empire State in the foreground and the twin towers of the World Trade Center in the distance. As the sun went down the skyscrapers were floodlit and it was, clearly, one of the great sights of the world.



Jane & John Scott, from St. Paul's Cathedral, graced us with their lively and courteous presence, and, if that weren't enough, the evening finished with a superb five-star dinner. Whatta way to go!

THRILLS GALORE 3 It had been my joy during the year to welcome cholemasters from many parts of the US, including two from Atlanta! who'd read my books and who wanted to watch me lead practices at Trinity. The culmination came when Paul Ellis flew all the way from New

Zealand to watch me for a week! That blew my mind! As a result of that visit he invited me to lead courses in NZ in 2000. Yes!

May & June

THRILLS GALORE 4 And so began the process of saving farewells. There was a super abundance of farewell parties which left my head reeling. I was awarded my honorary doctorate in Princeton University Chapel and my joy was made complete because a former student of mine from the Royal Northern College of Music, Mark Stringer, who is now director of examinations for Trinity College, London, was able to be with me for that never-to-be-forgotten occasion. The Princeton Singers gave an unforgettable concert in Princeton University Chapel, with cousins Dr. Lucian & Karin Bertalot from Rome most happily present. At the end of which I led Dr. Steven Samitz to the rostrum, and then left my former Singers with their new conductor as I walked out to yet another standing ovation. There wasn't a dry eye.

There wasn't a dry eye the following day as my MBG choir and Alums sang our Final Evensong: "Lord let me know mine end...before I go hence and be no more seen." (Greene) and "God be in my head...and at my departing" (J. Will-

cocks)
Thus ended fifteen and a half blissful and

highly privileged years in Princeton. Completed, also, were exactly 40 years in this most precious and beautiful full-time vocation of praising God through magnificent music with talented and wonderful colleagues and supported by countless friends, **Deo Gracias!**

I return to England with the title of Assistant Regional Director of the RSCM. I look forward to leading courses and adjudicating at Music Festivals. And I shall return to the US next Spring to lead more workshops and, of course tour NZ and Australia in 2000. Let me know when I may visit you!

And so, dearest friends around the world, please stay in touch. Some of you are 'On Line' but all others must know someone who is. I'll send Newsletters On Line henceforth - if you'll send me your E mail address.

Mine remains:

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Trinity's MBG Choir & Alums

immediately before my final Evensong with them, Sunday, 7th June, 1998

