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## Newburgh Symphonic Chorale Welcomes Michael Saunders

In the wake of conductor Peter Sipple's relocation to Connecticut, the **Newburgh Symphonic Chorale** is moving forward with its fourth Artistic Director, **Michael Saunders**. A Hudson Valley native, Michael has sung with most of the Hudson Valley choral ensembles, including Cappella Festiva, the Classic Choral Society, Hudson Valley BachFest, Kairos, the Kartuli Ensemble, the New Paltz Community Chorale, and the Warwick Valley Chorale. He is also the Director of Music at Grace Episcopal Church in Middletown.

"One of my favorite music-related quotes," states Saunders, "comes from author Robert Fulghum: "Never forget that music is too important to be left entirely in the hands of professionals."

"Although I can call myself a 'professional musician' with a clear conscience," Saunders says, "the most compelling musical experiences of my life have all been with amateurs - musicians who are motivated by the sheer joy of making music with each other. The Chorale is made up of amateurs in the best sense of that word. I have been singing with them since 2012, and I have always been impressed by their dedication and work ethic, which have consistently resulted in performances that are moving for both the singers and the audience.

"Although we don't require auditions, a clear standard of excellence has been established by my predecessors - **Claudia Cummings**,

**Ingrid Narkin**, and Peter. Although I am daunted by the prospect of following in their footsteps, I am committed to maintaining that standard with the Chorale's help.

"Much of what I know about choral singing and conducting I learned from **Janiece Kohler**, the current director of the Classic Choral Society. I frequently find myself thinking "What would Jan do?" when I am trying to solve a technical problem with the Chorale.

For their annual spring concert, the Chorale will offer a provocative and compelling program entitled *American Masters*, music of Randall Thompson, Aaron Copland, and Leonard Bernstein. "To be honest, I didn't give our repertoire for this season very much thought. Because this is my first season as director, I wanted to do music that I was already familiar with, rather than having to start from scratch. I have fond memories of preparing and performing Aaron Copland's *Old American Songs*, Randall Thompson's *Frostiana* and Leonard Bernstein's *Make Our Garden Grow* from *Candide* under Jan's expert direction.

"I actually met Aaron Copland briefly when



*Newburgh Symphonic Chorale*

I was in high school. I lived at West Point where my father was a professor, and one weekend Maestro Copland visited the academy to give a lecture for the cultural enrichment of the

cadets. Our family used to attend services at the Cadet Chapel, and on that Sunday who should walk in but Aaron Copland! I nervously approached him after the service with my bulletin in one hand and a pen in the other: "May I have your autograph please, Mr. Copland?" He refused!

"As Artistic Director of the Newburgh Chorale, I am finally in a position to retaliate by leaving Mr. Copland off of our American Masters program, but I have decided to take the high road.

"This year marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Leonard Bernstein, whose *Candide* finale promises to be an exciting culmination to a program of beautiful choral music. We are looking forward to sharing it with you!"

Saunders' maiden voyage as the Chorale's conductor is on **June 3 at 4:00pm** at **St. George's Church**, 105 Grand Street, in Newburgh. Plenty of parking across the street. Tickets at the door.