

Chicago a cappella
Friend of the Year Award
Presented to The Saints
with special recognition to Robert Fashingbauer

May 20, 2010
Some Enchanted Evening Benefit
Chicago Cultural Center

*Tribute given by Jonathan Miller,
Founder and Artistic Director of
Chicago a cappella:*

When *Chicago a cappella* had its debut concerts in September 1993, we pressed anyone we could find into service: friends, wives, husbands, neighbors, colleagues from the other places we were working at the time, you name it. These kind people took tickets and passed out programs. But managing it, as I was, turned out to be pretty stressful, and all of the details of running the house made it hard to concentrate on the singing and conducting, which I was also doing.

When Matt Greenberg became executive director in the fall of 1995, he had the wisdom to cultivate a deeply loyal group of volunteer ushers. The people whom we honor tonight come from an organization aptly named “The Saints,” which serves more than 50 organizations around the city with ushers and house staff.

Over the years, as we have added performances and locations, the sophistication of our box office and ushering operations has likewise continued to grow and improve. An important part of our moving into the big leagues was establishing a relationship with the Saints, which we did in 2002. Having the Saints as a resource has allowed our small staff to concentrate on things that we do best. We’ve saved literally thousands of hours of staff time and tens of thousands of dollars during the past decade and a half because the Saints have served as our ushers. For this we are deeply grateful, and for this we honor the Saints tonight.

We are honoring, in addition to the Saints, a particular gentleman who has served as the classical music coordinator for the Saints – a man who, with his kindness, steadiness and loyalty, has been a true Saint to *Chicago a cappella*. Bob Fashingbauer is a great guy, and it was through him that we connected with the Saints.

I always get a feeling of “oh, good, Bob’s here” every time he and I greet one another at one of our concert venues. If you’re lucky, you have at least one person in your life who provides a sense of competence and calm. Bob Fashingbauer is that for *Chicago a cappella*. We were fortunate to get to know Bob early in our existence, along with his wife Betty. It was way back in



Chicago a cappella executive director Matt Greenberg (left) and artistic director Jonathan Miller (right) present the ensemble’s Friend of the Year award to Bob Fashingbauer.

1996 that they started volunteering to usher at our concerts. Wow, were they good! You can probably imagine what a relief it was to have people working side by side with us, ushers who were experienced, calm, competent, energetic, and focused.

From the first time they helped us out, Bob and Betty brought to Chicago *a cappella* their experience ushering at the CSO and other larger institutions. Matt has told me how he remembers, in our early days, getting great advice from both Bob and Betty about how the "big boys" do it. Bob and Betty personally have now volunteered at so many CAC concerts that they both know first-hand our culture of customer service and friendliness -- and have contributed to shaping to that culture.

A smooth and pleasant journey from the front door of a venue to your seat in the concert hall is the first ingredient in creating the complete Chicago *a cappella* experience for you. Getting you to your seat in a pleasant and gracious way is more important than you might think at first blush, and it's one of those aspects of performance that usually goes unnoticed if it's done well. However, it takes effort and care to do it well. Bob and Betty and the Saints have done this well for decades.

In his role as classical music coordinator, Bob has been almost like an adjunct staff member for our organization. For each concert season that we prepare, we simply tell him how many people we need, when and where. He fills all the rosters, keeping in mind our needs, and communicates that with Deb Hoban, our operations coordinator. If Bob has trouble finding enough people, he lets us know well in advance and works with us to encourage more volunteers.

This year, dozens of Saints provided our front-of-house staff for 16 performances on our home series. Multiply that by the more than 50 other organizations which the Saints serve, and you can start to appreciate the impact that the Saints have on Chicago's entire performing arts community. I imagine that a day rarely goes by when a Saint is not making something great happen in Chicago, and there must be some nights when almost all of us are performing. Think about the logistics, the manpower, and then think about the generosity of heart that every Saint brings to their work of service. Where does that come from? Well, it's tempting to chalk it up to something like the old Xerox commercial, where the monk watched a copy of an illuminated manuscript come out of a copier, and he would look to heaven and say, "It's a miracle." Well, in some sense having the Saints is a miracle, but make no mistake—this is hard work by dedicated volunteers, and in the world of the performing arts in Chicago, the Saints truly make the world go round.

At this time I invite all the Saints present to join me on stage, and I invite everyone here to join me in a round of applause for our Friends of the Year – the Saints – and special honoree Bob Fashingbauer. Congratulations and thank you.