

2017-K392

Assembly Resolution No. 392

BY: M. of A. Gottfried

COMMEMORATING the 200th Anniversary of the St.
George's Choral Society

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to recognize and commend those musical organizations that have brought entertainment and cultural enrichment to the citizens of the great State of New York; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the St. George's Choral Society to be celebrated at a performance of Antonin Dvorak's "Stabat Mater" on Sunday, April 30, 2017, in the Church of the Incarnation in New York, New York; and

WHEREAS, Founded on February 12, 1817, St. George's Choral Society is the oldest choir in New York City; on this auspicious day, a committee met on Stuyvesant Square to approve a constitution for a Society of St. George's Church for the Cultivation of Sacred Music to be supported by the congregation of the church; and

WHEREAS, Most of the Choral Society's performances have taken place in St. George's Church on Stuyvesant Square, often on Sunday afternoons; the Church made headlines throughout the 1800s for its innovative approach to worship as the first Episcopalian parish to allow female choir members; and

WHEREAS, Throughout its two centuries of exceptional choral work, St. George's Choral Society has crossed paths with numerous composers, soloists, and directors of renown; and

WHEREAS, In the 1890s, the Society's name became associated with Czech composer, Antonin Dvorak; in February of 1891, the St. George's Choral Society performed "Stabat Mater," directed by Richard Henry Warren; a year later, they gave the American premiere of his "Requiem Mass"; and

WHEREAS, In 1894, Harry Burleigh came to St. George's Church as a baritone soloist, a position he held for 52 years; he brought traditional black spirituals to their audience for the first time and inaugurated an annual concert of spirituals at the Church; the Choral Society continued the annual concert for many years after his death, and has continued to perform Burleigh spirituals through the decades; and

WHEREAS, The Choral Society lapsed during World War II and was re-founded in 1950 by George Kemmer, a longtime organist and music director at St. George's Church; after his retirement, Charles Henderson served as director from 1956-1971; and

WHEREAS, Performing an average of four concerts a year, the Choral Society was privileged to collaborate with great talent such as concert organist E. Power Biggs; in 1964, they sang a televised performance of Benjamin Britten's "Noyes Fludde"; that same year, they appeared at the Philharmonic Hall, performing Bach's "Magnificat" and a 1958 "Magnificat" setting by Alan Hovhaness; and

WHEREAS, In addition, the noted scholar and musicologist Adrienne Fried directed members of St. George's Choral Society for a concert featuring Brahms, Stravinsky, and Poulenc in 1969; and

WHEREAS, In the 1970s, after the renovation of St. George's Church, the Choral Society continued to perform under the direction of Wayne Cohn; highlights of this era included a staged concert of King David by Arthur Honegger; the first performance of a new translation of Bach's "St. John Passion"; and the world premiere of "Seek the Lord," an original composition by the Choral Society's assistant director, Bradley Hull; and

WHEREAS, The Choral Society entered the 1980s under the direction of Calvin Hampton, whose music drama "It Happened in Jerusalem" had its world premiere with the Society in 1982; two years prior, he directed the Choral Society in the first full performance in French of "Les Beatitudes" by Cesar Franck; and

WHEREAS, After Calvin Hampton's death, there was a hiatus of several years without a major concert; after becoming the Music Director for St. George's Church in 1988, Kenneth Dake reimagined the Choral Society as a community chorus combining voices of all faiths to perform a wide variety of works; and

WHEREAS, Through Kenneth Dake's wisdom, the voices tripled in number within two years, the Choral Society gained a Board, and the budget increased significantly; Kenneth also initiated the Summer Sing-ins, which were an annual six-week series of evenings where choristers sang classical music for fun; and

WHEREAS, During this era, the Choral Society presented a quarterly newsletter, hosted annual picnics in the Hudson Valley, and held benefit concerts at the National Arts Council and Cabaret evenings; and

WHEREAS, In the early 1990s, the Choral Society performed everything from arias to show tunes to revues of "20th Century Americana"; in 1992,

the Society took part in a campaign to have a statue of Antonin Dvorak moved from the roof of Avery Fisher Hall to Stuyvesant Square, where his house had just been demolished; a concert of his "Mass in D," "Biblical Songs," and "Te Deum" was supported by the American Fund for Czechoslovak Refugees; and

WHEREAS, In 1997, Kenneth Dake was succeeded by Kyler Brown, who later resigned as music director of St. George's Parish but continued as Director of the Choral Society; this was the first time that the two positions were separated and it laid the groundwork for the Choral Society to become an independent organization; in the late 1990s, the Choral Society performed more and more often outside of St. George's Church, including with St. Patrick's Choir for the annual "City Singing at Christmas"; and

WHEREAS, Harry Huff, who had been Calvin Hampton's Assistant Director 20 years earlier, took over as director of the Choral Society from 2000-2004; on September 12, 2001, he organized a program commemorating "Day 2 of Attack on America," with a Sing-Out for Healing and Peace featuring Felix Mendelssohn's "Be not afraid" and "He, watching over Israel" as well as Haydn's "Agnus Dei" from Mass in Time of War; and

WHEREAS, In 2004, the directorship passed to the current leader, Dr. Matthew Lewis; two years later, the group launched its own website, and became a nonprofit organization separate from the church in 2009; concerts moved from St. George's Church to the Church of the Incarnation; and

WHEREAS, The arts, in whatever form depicted, are central to human expression; they are truly a universal language and their contribution

to the development of friendship and understanding among all peoples cannot be overestimated; and

WHEREAS, It is the practice of this Legislative Body that when musical societies of such noble aims and accomplishments are brought to our attention, they should be recognized by all the citizens of this great Empire State; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the St. George's Choral Society; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Dr. Matthew Lewis, Conductor, St. George's Choral Society.