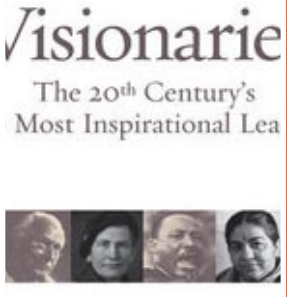


CULTURE

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Spring socials



By Alan Lewis
Special to the *Vermont Guardian*

Any reference to spring at this point must be music to Vermont ears, as winter 2007 has shown no urge for going.

So when the Social Band claims in a recent tour announcement: “With pieces drawn from a wide array of world music and time periods, Social Band explores the miracle of spring and of life,” perhaps it can bring the season in on time.

The Social Band’s announcement, drawing from “Anthem: Seasons of the Year,” cheerily sings, “He calls the warmer gales to blow and bids the spring return.”

The occasion is a series of concerts set for Richmond, Lincoln, Montpelier, and Burlington titled *Showers of Blessings: Sacred and Secular Songs of the Season*.

Don Jamison, who sings bass and contributes original music, and Liz Thompson founded Social Band in 1998 “to explore the diverse repertoires of both traditional and

‘art’ music.” Asked to comment on the space filled by this group at its creation, Artistic Director Amity Baker said, “If there was a void it was [for] a group in the Burlington area that sang things from both the folk and the classical ends of the musical spectrum. I think that’s the void we fill. We also have an ongoing commitment to newly composed pieces.”

Baker, in a 2005 interview, told the *Vermont Guardian*, “This feeling of community music-making is part of what inspires Social Band — the idea that you don’t necessarily have to look outside your community for what you need but can thrive within your own creative resources.”

Recently, when asked what is grassroots about Social Band and its concerts, she added, “Mainly because we are a group of dedicated amateurs. And one of the ties that binds our diverse repertoire is its foundation in community singing traditions. There’s also our dedication to serving up a healthy portion of ‘locally-grown’ tunes.

“‘Digging in the Garden’ is definitely a home-grown piece with a catchy hook. It’s been in our repertoire for several years now and is always a crowd pleaser.”

Baker chooses many of the songs Social Band sings, but consults with other members. “I do mainly but I consult a lot with Don Jamison who has an infallible artistic sense and a lot of know-how. Members of the group will suggest things also. There’s a lot of collective talent and ideas within the group to draw upon.

“Almost without exception, I am drawn to pieces at an aesthetic level. Pieces come from a number of sources. Sometimes I’ll hear a recording and think something is suited for Social Band. Sometimes I will have sung it as part of another choral project and pass it along. At other times, members will bring things to my attention. A good amount of material comes from me searching my collections of music or going to the UVM library to look through scores.

“And then again,” she added, “we are also lucky enough to have a lot of talented composers send their new works our way.

“Structurally, I believe we are unique also,” she said, shifting directions. “We are very organized and demand a high level of singing from ourselves.

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“It is ... true that I get the final say in things artistic. However, rehearsals have a very collaborative feel and we are definitely in the business of expressing a shared vision that all the members have some sort of stake in.

“Since I was a small child, I have always tended to fill leadership vacuums so that tendency is natural to my personality. From an artistic standpoint, I have a long and varied experience as a singer and am deeply drawn to things vocal. I have good powers of analysis and a quick ear. I also have a relatively good grounding in music theory and I have a lot of talented, knowledgeable, lovely musicians around me.”

A few members of Social Band worked with Banjo Dan Lindner on “Black Cemetery,” an outstanding cut on his stellar *Mystery and Memories: Banjo Dan’s Songs of Vermont Volume III*.

“I think Dan approached us because we have a reputation for doing newly composed works,” observed Baker. “I enjoyed helping Dan fine-tune his piece and going in the studio. It was also a pleasure getting to know Dan and I hope he’ll continue to explore the choral style.”

It seems he has a knack.

Social Band’s *Vermont Composers Project* was hands down one of the best albums of its year. Responding to hints for news of a Vol. 2, Baker said, “We are currently well into planning another phase of the Vermont Composers Project [VCP]. We’ve asked seven Vermont composers from a spectrum of styles and backgrounds to compose tunes on the theme of idleness and rest. These will be premiered in November of 2007 and we are ready to line up another group of composers for the Spring of 2008.

“We learned from the VCP that we wanted to combine newly commissioned works with pieces from the other styles we are accustomed to perform. We consider this to be the best of all worlds. The long and the short of it is that the first VCP inspired us to make this an ongoing project in the life of our group. We’ll see where it takes us. There will almost certainly be other recordings in our future.”

Where does Social Band fit into Vermont’s music community? “Definitely choral with a bit of a twist,” said Baker.

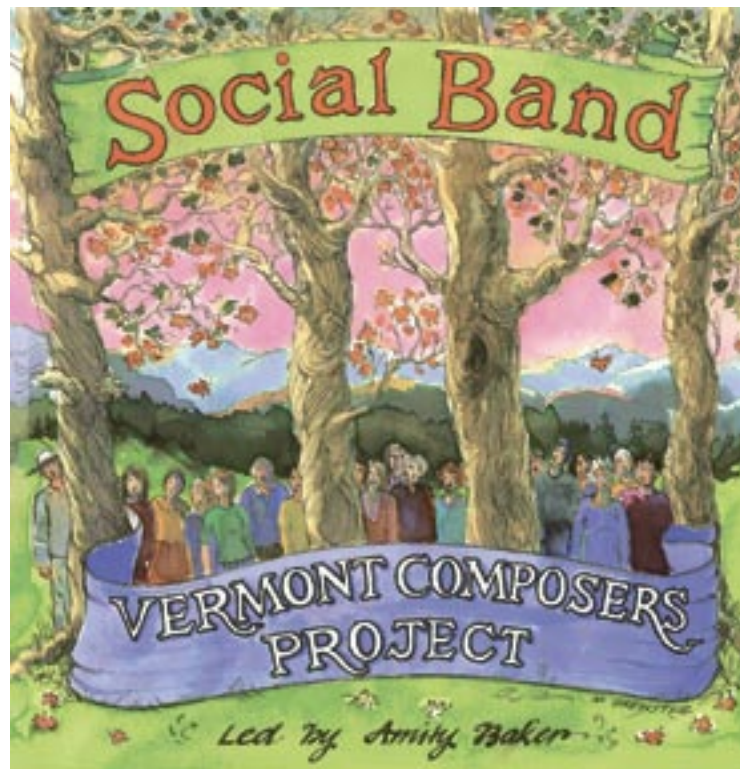
And what about those new works? “‘Jackson Heights’ is a new piece of Don’s and as usual it

is intuitive and accessible without being predictable,” she said. “It’s written in 5/8 (an irregular meter) that you find in a lot of Balkan music. That can be awkward for folks like you and me but Don writes it so gracefully, it’s easy to sing.”

Churches are the sites for three of the upcoming Social Band concerts. “We sing in churches,” said Baker, “because in Vermont, they are readily available, have the best acoustics for a cappella singing, and are the right size.”

The *Guardian* has described Social Band as “distinguished and fun rolled into one.” The latest tour announcement, in a parallel vein, said the group’s “presentation strikes a balance between raw exuberance and polished sound.”

Judge for yourself at any of these upcoming *Showers and Blessings* concerts. ☪



- Who:** Social Band
- What:** *Showers of Blessings: Sacred and Secular Songs of the Season*
- When:** Saturday, 7:30 p.m., at the Richmond Public Library
 Sunday, 3 p.m., at the Lincoln United Church
 March 30, 7:30 p.m., at the Unitarian Church in Montpelier
 March 31, 7:30 p.m., at the Unitarian Meetinghouse in Burlington

For more information: www.socialband.org/

Featured Non-Profit

Darfur

How to help stop the Genocide:

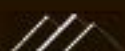
www.savedarfur.org

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