

MUSIC

A MUSICAL JOURNEY

BY CHRIS NICHOLS

MY DAY JOB in the tech world is rewarding, but music is my passion. And much of my musical journey has played itself out on Fillmore Street.

It started two decades ago with a friend's invitation to a Thursday night rehearsal of the choir at Calvary Presbyterian Church at Fillmore and Jackson. Alden Gilchrist was directing — my first encounter with this world-class musician and wonderful human being, who was at the heart of Calvary's musical excellence for more than 60 years, until his death in 2014.

Both Alden and his spirited rehearsal were terrific. I returned again the next week. At the end of the rehearsal, Alden tapped me on the shoulder. "Chris, could I see you for a minute?" he beckoned. To my relief, I wasn't getting a quick boot. Instead, Alden invited me to join the choir on a two-week tour of France, singing in Notre Dame in Paris and other great churches, including the magnificent cathedral in Chartres.

Mostly we performed classical music, on that tour and afterward, but we also had fun with fund-raising concerts — including an evening of French cabaret when we sang as the audience dined on tables set with checkered tablecloths in the church basement.

BEFORE I BEGAN my career in the business world, I'd gotten a masters of arts in music and performed leading roles in small opera productions, including *Figaro*, *Don Gio-*



After 20 years of making music in the neighborhood, tenor Chris Nichols (left) will present a solo recital on February 25. He will be joined for a duet by guest soprano Heidi Moss Erickson (center) and accompanied by pianist Peter Grunberg (right).

vanni and *The Magic Flute*. At Calvary, I returned to solo performance as a baritone, first with the choir, and later in a recital in the chapel with my teenaged daughter, Gabrielle Goozee-Nichols. After she returned from college, she joined the choir and became the director of the children's choir at Calvary. Now she is assistant conductor of the adult choir. And 18 years ago I met my life partner Carol Fox in the choir, where we still sing.

Calvary draws people from the neighborhood and beyond for its music. In addition to the chancel choir, children's choir and jazz musicians, the San Francisco Bach Choir and many others perform at the church.

Three years ago, a remarkable thing began to happen for me as a singer. I'd always been a baritone, but people I respect suggested I might actually be a tenor. I started taking lessons again,

and a different voice began to emerge.

Then at a Calvary recital I met Maxine Bernstein, who runs an organization called Lieder Alive! dedicated to the performance and appreciation of lieder — the German word for song, and also a genre of classical music for singer and piano written by most of the major composers since Beethoven. Through her I joined a monthly master class and speeded up my transformation into a tenor by singing German lieder.

THIS MONTH, after 20 years of music-making in the neighborhood, I will perform a solo recital, "For the Love of Leider," in the chapel at Calvary on February 25 at 5 p.m.

I still spend my workdays at the office or on the road. But I am grateful for the rich musical journey that Calvary and some very special people in my life continue to encourage.