

Bittersweet SYMPHONY

After 43 years with the estimable La Jolla Symphony & Chorus, beloved choral director **David Chase** is retiring, with two final concerts June 10 and 11 at the Mandeville Auditorium at UC San Diego (tickets \$27 to \$39, lajollasympphony.com). Here, he chats with **Patrick Walders**, associate professor of music and director of choral studies at SDSU, as Walders prepares to take over the job in July.

As told to Angela Ashman // Photography by Jenny Siegart

Patrick Walders (left) will take over for David Chase at the La Jolla Symphony & Chorus.



David Chase: You, more than anyone I've known here, have a completely systematic picture in your mind of what life for a singer in San Diego should be in the future. Can you give me your outline of that concept?

Patrick Walders: My wife and I came from the Washington, D.C., area [nearly six years ago], and in D.C., you could actually make a living as a choral musician and certainly as a soloist. And that wasn't happening in San Diego. So we decided to make a nonprofit [San Diego Pro Arte Voices] to give San Diego vocalists a professional outlet where they could supplement their income. I also have a graduate program [at SDSU] where the students immediately go out into the field and contribute to elevating choral music in churches and in community choirs—and the next thing you know, a group like Folklore pops up or a group like Sacra/Profana is now under the direction of associate conductor Juan Carlos Acosta (Walders' former graduate assistant), who is doing wonderful things. And I think that as time is progressing, we're really seeing a change.

PW: What are the top two favorite moments in your storied career with LJS&C?

DC: The first time I had a chance to conduct the Bach *St. Matthew Passion*, which has a special place in every conductor's heart. And the next one would be when my entire family was involved in the U.S. premiere of a musical called *Boojum!*. My little girl—who is now a professional musician—and my wife were two of the leads, and the best moment in the show was when

they performed a duet. My son was even singing in the chorus.

DC: You were a fairly avid lacrosse player in school. How does your experience with sports jibe with your vision of choral music—is there a connection?

PW: I do think they go hand in hand. I love having athletes in the ranks because you can trust that they're not going to be afraid to get their knuckles dirty in a rehearsal, and they're not going to shy away from the work.

PW: What are some of your favorite things about S.D. audiences? Any frustrations?

DC: I think San Diego audiences have been pretty conservative up until the last 10 years, and I think LJS&C has finally found an audience, which is probably the thing that I'm most proud of for us. And, of course, there are frustrations.

DC: What excites you the most about the position of choral director of the LJS&C?

PW: This is an artistic platform that was missing from my life and my career, and I'm so excited and humbled and honored about the opportunities to premiere larger works of new music.

PW: What would you tell young and aspiring conductors as they begin their career in 2017?

DC: I think 2017 is a really good time to be starting. The most important thing is to have a much wider view of what the world could be for you and your part in music than most people have had in the past. And learn from somebody who has a broader picture of the world than you do.