

READING MUSICAL FOUNDATION
Contact: Tammy K. Mitgang, President
Phone: 610-376-3395
Fax: 610-376-3336
Email: tmitgang@readingmusicalfoundation.org

RMF to Commission Song Settings of Poems by Local Pennsylvania German Poet Peter Fritsch



January 21, 2007 - The Reading Musical Foundation has commissioned composer Robert Maggio to set several poems by Peter V. Fritsch to song for children's chorus. Each poem is from Fritsch's recently published book, *Der Haahne Greht*. The Berks Classical Children's Chorus, a local music presenter funded by the Foundation, will premiere the cycle of songs, all in Pennsylvania German.

The project was conceived and funded by the Foundation's immediate past chairman, C. Thomas Work, and embraced by the Foundation to promote Berks County's strongly Pennsylvania German heritage and further the Foundation's efforts in music education, music appreciation, and the development of music as an art form. The song cycle will expose performers and audience to the language, practices and humor of the Pennsylvania Germans, who are responsible for much of the region's rich musical heritage.

The project honors Alma Shollenberger, her sister Hazel Wertley and Hazel's husband Orion Wertley, all of Hamburg and now deceased, who were close to Work's family for more than two generations. "It is a tribute to three extraordinary individuals who invariably found the best in everyone and valued the gift of music," Work said.

Fritsch, of Alburtis, Pennsylvania, is a graduate of Kutztown University and retired art teacher in the Reading schools. He dedicated the poems in *Der Haahne Greht* to his paternal grandmother, Hannah R. Fritsch, who encouraged him to learn and speak Pennsylvania German "when it was not fashionable to do so." Fritsch will coach the children's chorus in pronouncing the language of his poems. Ironically, the two sisters whom Work chose to honor last resided within miles of Fritsch's childhood home in Longswamp Township.

A graduate of Yale University and the University of Pennsylvania, Maggio teaches music theory and composition at West Chester University. His works have been performed by the nation's major symphony orchestras and choruses. Several of his compositions have been premiered by local performing organizations funded by the Reading Musical Foundation. They include *I Hear America Singing*, a work commissioned and premiered in 2004 by the Reading Choral Society with funding from Sovereign Bank, and *Music in the Wings*, for trumpet solo and concert band premiered last spring by the Ringgold

Band and commissioned by the Reading Musical Foundation to honor Ringgold's conductor, James S. Seidel, and the Ringgold Band itself.

Fritsch and Maggio will hold workshops for participants in the Berks Classical Children's Chorus to explore the process of creating poetry and music, and setting poetry to music.

Der Haahne Greht and a recording, by Fritsch, of his poems recited in Pennsylvania German are available through local bookstores and Masthof Press in Morgantown, Pennsylvania.