



Associated Male Choruses of America, Inc.

THE
chorister
Newsletter



<http://amcofa.net/>

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Christmas in Rochester

Ed Armbruster

We had one of our busier Christmas seasons in quite a while this past December. In not quite two weeks we gave five concerts, including two the same day. That may not be much to some of you, but it's a lot for our chorus.

We started with a dinner performance on Monday for the Minnesota Association of County Commissioners, meeting in Rochester. Most of you know what it's like to try to perform while your audience is eating, and this was no exception. But, as one of our members opined, "consider this a paid rehearsal."

We were invited to give two concerts for the Think Credit Union's Prime Time Event (55 and over) on Wednesday. This involved singing for an hour and a half in the afternoon, and then again in the evening; both times the audience numbered about four hundred. While this may have cut into our regular concert's attendance somewhat, I think we sang to a lot of people who had never heard us before, so perhaps it was worth the strain on our voices.

Saturday brought our "regular" Christmas concert, again in a beautiful (almost) new Lutheran sanctuary. As we had last year, we divided the program, with the first half consisting of mostly secular holiday songs, and the second half telling the Christmas story, with readings from Luke interspersed with appropriate Christmas songs and carols, with no audience interruption until the end of the concert. We continue to have positive feedback from our listeners about this approach, and it does place more emphasis on the real "reason for the season."

One week later, we sang the Christmas portion of our concert in another almost-new sanctuary, this time a Seventh-Day Adventist church in a neighboring community. Following the formal concert, we entertained the guests in the fellowship hall with the rest of our prepared numbers.

We enjoyed being able to share with so many people, but our voices were glad when that concert was over and they could rest!

AMCofA Scholarships

Bob Torborg, Scholarship Chairman

Many choruses are approaching mid-term timing for this season's activities. Christmas concerts are past, you're preparing new programs, and Big Sing details may be the order of the day.

This is also the time to remind you all of Scholarship activities. The AMCofA is awarding four generous scholarships again in April, 2007. I hope that by now your chorus' Governor will have made his pitch to all of you for the purpose of finding worthy candidates. If not, please ask him to do so.

We all have someone who should be considered. While it is true that the organization only awards four scholarships, this should not diminish the number of candidates we sponsor and evaluate. The AMCofA is trying to support those that show the most promise in their demonstrated capabilities and their attitude for the

future. You can help this process by sponsoring someone 'from your neighborhood,' so to speak, for this opportunity.

Last year's candidates were all talented, did well, were committed to community and civic affairs and provided good performance material. The awardees were those that came out a bit better than the others. We are still recruiting Evaluators as well. If your talents and time allow, consider offering your services to this valuable task. Contact me (scholarship@amcofa.net) if you are interested and I will send you guideline documents. You can get application forms from the AMCofA Web site (<http://amcofa.net/scholar/formsdownload.shtml>).

Remember the deadline for candidates is March 1. Give them a break by providing plenty of time to get their documents organized and to present their performance for or with your chorus personnel.

Have a happy and productive new year!

Lock City Enabled by Grant

Ric Addenbrooke

The Lock City Glee Club received a grant in 2004 for the purchase of sheet music to perform a Christmas Concert for the surrounding community. The concert was held at a local church and free to anyone, with a free will offering split with the church.

During planning for this concert, we determined that sharing the program would give us an interval for resting our voices. We found a good match in a group of handbell ringers who had gained a good reputation in our area. The church at which we performed had their own handbell choirs, but this was a divergence for them and good for visitors not familiar with this type of music.

The concert proved successful, with nearly half of the seating of a large church filled on a Sunday afternoon during football season. Also, we had struggled with some of the music, but still made it sound well. We were pleased with the results enough to proceed with plans to continue with another concert the following year.

As we had searched for a site to hold the concert, several churches eagerly offered to host it. Two of those wanted the next year (2005), so we planned both '05 and '06, according to which could handle the dates best. The 2005 concert was out in the country (Barker), while this year brought us back to Lockport again and attracted the largest audience yet, with a nearly full church.

The Glee Club gained in another way, also. We annually sing at the local assisted living and nursing homes leading up to Christmas. Our music had become somewhat stale, but the residents were always ready for our visits. The grant turned out to be "seed" money for music. The first concert brought back money for music the following year, and likewise that year gave some money for this year. Since each venue was in a different location, we were free to carry over some music from the previous concert. The nursing homes got to hear new music each time for the past three years.

Many choruses fail to apply for grants, sometimes because they don't know how or where to do so. Sometimes they fail the first attempt and don't like rejection. Whatever the reason, anyone can overcome the trials and ordeals with patience and practice. Keep trying, and use the funds well when you get lucky, because that will be the best way to get lucky again. People handing out funds like successes and will lean toward them again.

Have a great new year, one that perhaps includes a Christmas concert of your own chorus from a grant you were given.

Membership Stagnation

Steve Erdman, Milwaukee Male Chorus

[A "letter to the editor" that I thought was worth wide distribution.]

At the risk of alienating a lot of well-intentioned, good people, I have to express my opinion regarding the AMCA's 'elephant in the room': membership stagnation. The issue of stagnation of all types is our largest, and from my view as a new member of the MMC, the most important we face.

In the MMC, we've had very lively discussions as to the causes of this and the solutions. It's difficult to overcome literally decades of neglected membership campaigns when you look around and see that with the exception of some true 'classics' we're singing the same songs to the same types of audiences as we did 20 to 40 years ago. For example, some 'pop' songs were published in the 1920s to the 1950s and were performed by us in the 60s and beyond. If audiences could enjoy 'pop' music that was 10 to 40 years old then, why can't we 'get over the hump' and give them 'pop' music now that has been published from the 1960s to the 1990s or, heaven forbid, more recently?

One school of thought says that our typical audience, i.e., nursing homes, wants to hear the old stuff. Well, if we keep doing that, pretty soon we'll all be singing the old stuff to ourselves when we're all *in* the nursing homes, because we won't be able to recruit any new blood. In Milwaukee, there's a great number of diversions and the competition for talent is fierce. We don't have the luxury of standing still and proclaiming that the status quo is fine.

Our chorus is divided into two contingents: the pro-membership growth, perform-music-that-will-attract-new-YOUNGER-members-as-well-as-retain-our-dedicated-older-members group; and the pro-membership growth, perform-music-that-will-appeal-to-our-nursing-home-audiences group. Some believe that if we follow the first group's direction, we'll lose our core audience. I disagree. I believe that music performed well and with passion can be appreciated by nearly any audience, especially those in their twilight years who are just happy to have visitors. I also disagree with the assertion that we'll be able to attract and retain new members by performing tired, old and/or obscure music which only satisfies our 'snob appeal.' Why? Because it hasn't worked in Milwaukee since the 1960s. That's when we were performing music that was 10 to 40 years old, remember?

How serious is this problem? I'm 50 years old and there are only two guys younger than me in our chorus; they're both in their mid-forties. I also believe it's possible that some senior members may think of this as a men's club that happens to sing rather than a dedicated society of amateur vocalists who take their craft seriously.

Finally, I note that the song of ours for which the audience applauded the loudest at last year's Big Sing in the U.P. was a Billy Joel hit from the 80s called "The Longest Time." The vast majority of our members didn't want to learn it, but our progressive director, Rob Clark, persisted and it turned out to be our most popular song. We'll never be successful at growing our membership by living in the distant past.

Maennerchor "Serves" the Community

Bob Torborg

For the past 10 years or so, the Maennerchor has had a tradition of presenting Christmas Concerts in the area. Sometimes it has been in conjunction with other area choirs. One year we added a brass group to make the "Hallelujah Chorus" more powerful.

One part of each year's Christmas events is singing at our area care facility for the aged. It is a large complex which has small apartments in one segment, assisted living apartments in another, and a nursing home care facility for residents who need daily help. This facility has an annual 'family weekend' in early December for all residents and their visiting families, usually the first weekend of the month. It has become an annual event for the Maennerchor to present a concert in each part of this facility on that special Sunday.

Typically our group presents a 35 – 40 minute concert in each of the facility's segments. We begin with warm-ups at about 1:30 and start the rounds at 2:00 P.M. From that point on, these programs occur at 45 minutes intervals. There is a little time in between to pick up some of the fabulous food the facility provides for all. We present the third concert in the chapel of the nursing home. The staff opens all of the adjoining walls for the people to see and hear.

The music we present ranges from a bit of easy sing-a-long to very solid material. We performed the "Hallelujah Chorus," for example, at each of the three venues.

Good concerts are always satisfying, but when the audience is filling the place from directly in front of you (arms reach) to standing in the entrance at the back, it is especially satisfying. Our group looks forward to this event each year.

The Maennerchor has presented Dinner Concerts, in conjunction with a local supper club, on a regular basis for some time. Generally these consist of a three-night series in May. These have become a 'looked-forward-to' event with local folks and their friends.

This year we tried a Christmas Dinner Concert. The Chairmen and their spouses set up a program, selected a dinner menu, and arranged the venue. The facility seated about 250 people with room to move about and visit. Temporarily enlarging the stage allowed us to accommodate over 45 members and all of the electronics. We chose the weekend of December 9th and 10th for the concerts. Both evenings sold out.

The program began with a 45-minute presentation before dinner, with casual uniforms and some selections on the light side. After dinner and desserts, we presented the second part of the program. This part, in full tuxedo uniforms, was more formal and included music in kind. Feedback from the audience was very positive.

As with all of these programs, the hope is to warm the hearts of those in the audience while attaining the same joyous feeling in presenting it.

Such programs seem to fit the AMCofA theme of fellowship and service to the community.

Eau Claire Features Tenors

Bob Wierman

Eau Claire MC held its annual Christmas concert on Dec. 2 at Regis High School, Eau Claire. We had nearly 40 members singing, and had an audience of nearly 500 for the event. Weather was cold but no snow.

This year's selections were varied, with several numbers featuring our tenor sections. Bill Seipel, Jr. had a wonderful solo in "Mary Had a Baby." The Elk Mound High School Choir also performed several selections. This group, directed by Rob Mondlock, had over 50 voices, and they did a nice job. They had the opportunity to sell tickets to their family and others and keep half the proceeds. They had a pizza party after the concert.

The week following, our chorus presented its concert at a local senior apartment complex. This was the second year for this performance and served as the manager's "treat" for the residents. The week prior to Christmas, members caroled at a local supermarket. Customers enjoyed some music as they were waiting in line and checking out. The smaller concerts and caroling add to our fund raising objectives for the year.

In early November our group did a special concert for the local Masonic Lodge Angel Fund. We were fortunate that one of our members helped to arrange the event, and the Lodge made a nice donation to the chorus for our concert. In recent years these special concerts and appearances have helped defray our expenses and keep our concert tickets at a reasonable price.

In March we will be participating in an annual patriotic concert sponsored by a local church, and we will be guests of Clark County Male Chorus just prior to the Cold Spring Big Sing. A busy second half is ahead.

A Look Forward

Ric Addenbrooke

A Happy New Year to all! I trust your holidays were at least pleasant and grandly more than expected, if possible. While you recall memories of the celebrations, please remember the folks in service to our country, the many who could not be home for Christmas or the New Year.

Traditions of resolutions for the New Year are all around us. Although I am not much for this tradition, it brings focus to needed improvements within our Association. Despite progress, we continue in 2007 to face challenges similar to those experienced this past year. The difficulty of getting all programs and projects operational while balancing a budget will test our mettle considerably, possibly even to the point of determining the future of the AMCA.

The challenge comes from what is left undone! I would like to disclose several key issues (though not all inclusive) and briefly state my thoughts on each:

1. Activity -

- Eau Claire International Big Sing 2008 - All indications seem to point to members' interest in continuation/ reestablishment of an Association-wide gathering (The International Big Sing) to confirm the health and capability of the AMCA. This being the case, registration and attendance to this year's event will help determine future Association activities. I expect the event to be a success! However, interest must be locally driven, and local leaders are the ones to depend on.
- Districts seem to be performing as they have in the past, with the exception of NYP, but recruiting must get attention again. (See *Programs*, next [and the previous article – Ed])

2. Programs -

- Music Committee - Don Crouch has been working to revamp this vital committee and seeks assistance from all districts to complete his committee membership. To serve all, he needs contributing members and feedback from every district. I expect success based on past history. Music is what we are all about. Without the music we're just another fellowship gang sitting around talking about the weather or something. The important change here will be the consolidation of several committees for efficiency.
- Recruitment, Promotion and Publicity Committee - Doug Farley awaits information from the Eau Claire chorus to begin preparations for that aspect of his work. (Currently he has added schedule difficulty because of his daughter's injury last Thanksgiving in an automobile accident. However, Doug's responsibilities have not been compromised, and his daughter is progressing. We wish her well.) Meanwhile, he needs assistance searching for marketable promotion items and ways to highlight our Association. Restructuring of the recruitment operation within the committee should get done this year. I expect this work to succeed with Doug's experience in promotion, but the jury is out on complete fulfillment; the districts must have individuals within to carry the workload into the members' choruses and offer feedback on success or failure for evaluation.
- *CHORISTER* newsletter - Ed Armbruster is a good editor, but he needs more input by way of contributions from the field. He can't justify putting out copy just to spend postage. Since members always seem to have something to say, they should have plenty to contribute to our newsletter. Our newsletter is limited only by our imagination, but nothing will come of it without information from member choruses: reports on good results from trying something different, comments on music, and maybe a feedback column in the future! Officers should be contributing regularly, myself included.
- AMCA Website - you could read the previous paragraph, but insert Dave Thomas, Webmaster, in place of Ed. Both these men depend solely on contributed work sent to them. They can polish up most anything offered.

3. Projects: The potential for projects is unlimited, if the body of talent is ready to tackle a few ideas.

Until the Executive Council gets a positive sense of membership support, I cannot ask them to push new things into the districts. Much of the capable talent I am sure we possess shyly lingers anonymous. We need volunteers to proceed with new programs. My expectation for this area ranges from not bad to quite good.

4. Elections - The next meeting of the Executive Council will have elections on the agenda, as terms end at the close of this fiscal year. I cannot speculate what will occur, as I have held no discussions with any of the current Council members or staff. The districts must vote their representation first, and the representatives then vote their choice for Chairman and Vice Chairman.

From my perspective as Chairman of the EC, I see a continued challenge to the Association: the need for more involvement. I witness good men with fine talent working for us, but not enough interested

members join the work. Without general membership interest, there will be little change, and without change there is stagnation.

I can implore participation; I can urge volunteering, but it is the old “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink!” simile. Guess I haven’t figured out how to motivate folks yet. My apologies!

I do not intend this as gloom and doom talk; please do not mistake my writing. Every challenge is an opportunity to address, another adventure to embrace. Talent includes aptitude, genius, and ability. We have much of that. Resiliency and perseverance, to be flexible and determined, is within our capacity. We do not lack the means to accomplish what we want, maybe we just need to decide what that is. The fellowship remains strong.

Winter in western New York is very different this year. In my online article, I wrote about “Octimber,” the freak early snow storm, but now we have unseasonably warm temperatures and no white! The odd weather has broken the rhythm somehow. Recent history in our Association has that same break-in-rhythm feeling. Although you are unaccustomed to it, you don't want to stop dancing. It's a good time; the party is not over. So we find a new step and keep on going.

Come to the music, and join the dance.

Winter Chorus Activities?

Ed Armbruster

What has your chorus done this winter? As always, this newsletter is only as good as the material YOU send me. I'm always looking for descriptions of interesting activities in which your choruses are involved. We could have another edition in the early spring if you send me news about your winter or early spring activities. Special thanks to those who already contributed (they make up the bulk of this edition). Email me (ed_armbruster@msn.com) with your reports. Don't worry about how they're written; that's the job of an editor. Just get me the information!

Upcoming Events

Ed Armbruster

Upper Midwest District Big Sing, “A Rock to Build On,” hosted by Cold Spring Area Maennerchor. St. John's University Abbey Church, Collegeville, Minnesota, April 27th and 28th, 2007.

New York Penn District Big Sing, hosted by Amherst Male Glee Club. Amherst, New York, November, 2007.

Wisconsin Upper Michigan Big Sing, hosted by Marquette Male Chorus. Marquette, Michigan.

International Big Sing, hosted by Eau Claire Male Chorus. Eau Claire, Wisconsin, April 25th and 26th, 2008.