

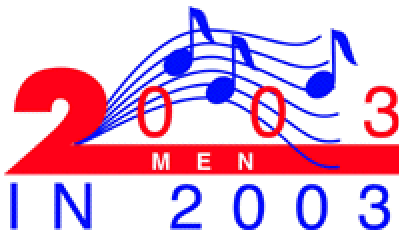
THE chorister

The Associated Male Choruses of America

<http://amcachorus.org>

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Norm Goodling, the President of the Associated Male Choruses of America, has asked that this issue of the Chorister be dedicated to the Big Sing scheduled in Lansing in April 2003. The men in my chorus are looking forward to the Big Sing in Lansing and have added many of the songs to our regular repertoire. We are excited about being part of what will be a great event.

To Gayle Pohl and the Greater Lansing Orpheus Male Chorus, we give you thanks for all the effort you are putting into the Big Sing; I am sure that you will be rewarded.

“Four years ago I requested and was granted the chance to hold this event here in Lansing. I felt then as I do now that Lansing has the right facilities, the right audience and the right kind of people to make this Big Sing the most memorable the AMC of A has witnessed in decades. In the four years since we were given the nod to proceed, a vision has evolved into a reality that surprises and impresses even us who have worked to bring it about. Our Steering Committee has planned three days filled with activities for chorus members, their families and the public at large. Indeed, it is truly a City of Lansing event. From an on field, massed chorus singing of the *Star Spangled Banner* to open a game of the Lansing's Lugnuts baseball team to a feature performance by the internationally known Cantus a cappella ensemble and Three Men and a Tenor, this Big Sing promises to be a hallmark in the history of male chorus singing in America. Shoulder to shoulder, members of your chorus and those of the rest of AMC of A will join in heart, mind and voice to create a truly unique fraternal, intellectual and musical extravaganza.”

**Gayle Pohl
Director, Greater Lansing Orpheus Male Chorus**

ABOUT OUR HOSTS



Gayle Pohl

The Greater Lansing Orpheus Male Chorus was founded in 1926 as the company chorus of the Reo Automotive Company. Now independent of corporate affiliation, the group is a member of the Associated Male Chorus of America and the Michigan Male Chorus Association. Membership in the group is open, without audition, to any man 17 years of age or older in the greater Lansing area. Its members are dedicated to musical growth, good fellowship and public service through performance.

This is a diverse group, including young men and retirees, from all walks of life. New members are welcome at any time though entrance is easiest in September or in January when new members have sufficient time to learn the music before the next concert. Experience in music reading, while helpful, is not a requirement.

The chorus is named for Orpheus, a figure in Greek mythology, who was so supremely gifted in the art of singing that even the rivers turned to follow him when he sang. According to legend, Orpheus charmed the gods with his song and won back his wife, Euridice, from death. The choice of Orpheus for the group's name reflects our belief in the power of music to enrich the human spirit.

The group performs a wide variety of music from the masterworks of male chorus literature to popular song arrangements, spirituals, religious music and Broadway show tunes. We traditionally give two public concerts per year in Lansing: the first in December and the second in May. In addition to these concerts, we travel each spring to perform at the District-wide Big Sing, involving the ten or so other member choruses for the Michigan Male Chorus Association, and we also perform as often as possible for service clubs and other functions.

Our rehearsals are on Monday nights from 7:00 pm to 9:15 pm at Central United Methodist Church, 215 North Capitol Avenue, across from the State Capitol. Our rehearsal season begins the Monday after Labour Day and ends with our final concert in late May. Rehearsals include a short break during which members may socialize.

Our director, Gayle Pohl, has been directing choirs for 30 years and makes the rehearsals a learning experience as well as an enjoyable one.



Photo by Bill Bates

AMCA EXECUTIVE MEMBERS TOUR THE FACILITY

At the June meeting in Lansing, the Executive took a tour of the facility for the 2003 Big Sing. There are unconfirmed reports that the group entertained the driver with a rousing version of “The Wheels of the Bus Go Round and Round”. Happily the bus arrived at the destination before they could get started with “Ninety-nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall”.

Everyone was excited about the Breslin Center, which will be the location for the Big Sing and Afterglow.



Breslin Center

The building has seating for more than 15,000 and I hope we sell out. Why not invite some friends to come along for the show?

WORDS FROM BILL BATES

The excitement is mounting as the date of our next International Big Sing approaches. The invitations are out, those planning to attend have responded by now, hotel rooms are booked and our members are looking forward with anticipation to a wonderful weekend of male chorus activities!

The date of course is April 24, 25 and 26 of the year 2003! Whether you are flying, driving, traveling by bus or train - Lansing, Michigan is your destination and the whole community is geared to offer you their most gracious hospitality. The Greater Lansing Convention and Visitors Bureau (GLCVB) is actively supporting this event hosted by the Lansing Orpheus Male Chorus under the guidance of Gayle Pohl, Sing Coordinator.

Community Support

At our last AMCA business meeting held in Lansing, I had dinner with the GLCVB representative and during my conversation with Jill the support of the Convention and Visitors' Centre was very evident. The GLCVB had subsidized the Saturday evening dinner for our Board of Directors and Jill had also participated in the tour of the facilities - the Breslin Center and the



Three Men and a Tenor

Lansing Convention Center. They have also been of assistance financially in the production of the three information booklets presented over the last three years by the host chorus. In addition, they are acting as a central agent in booking rooms for groups planning to attend the weekend. What great evidence of the welcome our members will receive when they arrive in this picturesque city on the Grand River.

Outstanding Facilities

The facilities are first rate for both the workshop sessions and the main concert. The huge costs of risers for so many singers that were a cost burden for our hosts in Buffalo at the last Sing, have been avoided by using Michigan State University's Breslin Center arena with the massed chorus seated at floor level and the audience in the elevated surrounding seats. Singers will enjoy having chairs to sit in when they are not performing, and the audience will have an unobstructed view of the concert. A unique and neat arrangement, I think!



Singers' Activities Abound

The men will have over 20 different workshop offerings to choose from, lead by the very best choral leaders from both the US and Canada. Members of *Cantus* and *Three Men and a Tenor* will join the men and will also be in concert.

CONFIRMED CLINICIANS

Dr. Leonard Riccinto, Eastern Michigan University - "Rehearsal & Conducting Techniques" & "Fundamentals of Choral Singing";

Dr. Timothy Seelig, Turtle Creek Chorale - "Open Wide & Say 'eeeeee' and Other Vocal Impossibilities";

Ms. Diane Loomer, Chor Leoni Men's Choir - "Canadian Choral Compositions", "How Do I Get My Choirs to Sound Like that?", "Do Men Have to Sing in Tights to Get a Laugh?", "Songs of War & Peace"

ADDITIONAL FACULTY

Dr. Jonathan Reed, MSU Assoc. Director of Choral Activities;

Dr. Joe Miller, Western MI University, Director of Choral Studies;

Mr. Donald Crouch, Director Milwaukee Male Chorus.

Take Me Out to the Ball Game

Another unique opportunity has been organized for the men planning to arrive on Thursday - they have been invited to sing the US National Anthem at the Lugnuts Triple 'A' baseball game. The Lugnuts have a huge fan base and play in a professional stadium near downtown Lansing. It should be an exciting evening for the participants. Although we haven't been told as yet, the game is usually televised, so wear your best smile!

"2003 Singers in 2003"

This slogan can be heard all around Lansing and one might reasonably ask, "How can an association of about 1200 singers put 2003 men on stage for a concert?" Well the answer is that this is the first International Big Sing that is billed as a "Festival of Male Choruses" and many choirs outside the AMCA have been invited to participate.

So the *LanSing* organizers have a vision that goes far beyond what has been attempted in past and their foresight should draw much attention to our organization from centres way beyond our border from Texas to British Columbia and all parts in between. Kudos to the Lansing Orpheus for this innovative approach!

ONE YEAR AGO

We will always remember what we were doing on that clear September morning. I was starting to work at the border between Fort Erie, Ontario and Buffalo, New York. I had one of the junior members of the Agency with me to see how we inspected food, plants and animals at the border. We had examined a shipment of guinea pigs destined for a lab (to ensure they were being transported in a humane manner) when one of the Customs Officers told me that a plane had flown into the World Trade Centre. My first thought was that this was the work of some reckless cowboy who had lost control of the plane while showing off. What followed was, of course, much worse. As we approach September 11, we will all remember the victims of those awful events and offer our prayers for peace and justice.

WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING?

Don Peterson has sent the following to the Chorister.

Port Huron Schubert Advances Cabaret Concert Style

By Wayne Miller, Port Huron Schubert Male Chorus

The Port Huron Schubert Male Chorus, in a move away from the traditional, hosted its annual *Inter-City Sing* in March of this year with an audience-pleasing cabaret-style format. The concert was held at the Wadhams Convention Center just outside the city of Port Huron, Michigan.

The annual event is a mini “District Sing” in that the music selections are the same as those of the Michigan District Sing that is held later in the year. Neighbouring choruses are invited as guests, giving these groups an opportunity to perform their district solo selection if they wish.

For many years the *Inter-City Sing* was performed in the conventional manner, with the chorus on stage and the audience seated in an auditorium. Three years ago, Port Huron Schubert decided to change the style of the program and go to more of a Cabaret style, as a way to increase audience attendance, which was then running about 250.

The cabaret concert consists of the audience seated at tables and the choruses performing from a portable stage. The first section of the program features the choruses singing in

mass, followed by a catered buffet-style dinner for audience and performers. The final part of the program highlights individual choruses performing their district solo selections as well as an After-Glow style selection.

In addition to being an unqualified hit with the audience, one of the principal advantages of the cabaret format is that all the choruses are able to hear all the other choruses perform their solo selections. The format has also been a learning experience for the Port Huron chorus; sound amplification and quality commands a great deal of attention as does seating and timing of meal service.

The inclusive style of the cabaret format brings the components of the After-Glow into the main program; therefore, no After Glow is held. The program, which begins at 6:30 p.m. and ends about 9:30 p.m., gives the audience and the chorus a full evening. In all cabaret concerts thus far, all have had a great time, and many of the 500-plus guests have requested that they be notified of future concerts of this type.



Norm Goodling

Male Bonding, one of the buzz phrases of the 90's! How often we have been exposed to the analogy as a reason for our actions in the past few years, decades, or centuries. The desire to gather and sing has been a part of our cultures worldwide and remains one of the few activities we're allowed to do together today without the raising of eyebrows by our female companions. Certainly not chauvinistic, this desire to gather, sing, chant and perform means as much today as it did centuries ago when men gathered around campfires, or stood on mountain tops to sing the virtues of their manhood.

Many, many of the numbers that we perform from our common repertoire allow members to unleash that testosterone vigour in a manner not often available to men in today's society. Our director will often stop the rehearsal to calm us down as we march our way through selections such as "Stouthearted Men", "Who Are The Brave?" or "There is Nothing Like a Dame!" (no longer sung by our chorus due to the demeaning lyrics). Often we hear ... "calm down guys" or the standard phrase "you sing a lot better when you sing softly!"

Is it the content, style or embodiment of masculinity that sets us off in a bombastic salute? Whatever it is - it is BONDING us together!!! I can only reflect on the very good memories and friends that I have made over the years while singing together as an organized group. I have performed in SATB

choruses and choirs but the lasting friendships have been established in the all-male venue. Today, I remain in contact with high school buddies that were a part of a men's chorus. I have retained friendships with members who performed side-by-side in our undergraduate Men's Glee Club at Western Michigan University in the late 50's and early 60's. Some are gone now but their memories remain as strong as ever.

Weekly I watch our 3 Life members from the Kalamazoo Male Chorus walk in to rehearsal (some with 60 year tenure in the group). **HOW GREAT IS THAT?** These gentlemen, not always able to keep up with the performance schedule, **NEVER** miss a rehearsal. Last year on the occasion of his 80th birthday I asked Charlie - "Why do you keep coming?" His reply, in his usual resounding bass was - "Because I can still sing!"

While it is always sad to see members leave, for whatever reason, we have bonded together for any number of years and now it is time to move on. But, those memories will always be cherished and hold a very special place in our hearts. Will they regret leaving - probably! **But such is life and we move on ... recruiting new members ... and the dream goes on ... to preserve the male chorus sound and to perform it to the best of our abilities for our audiences within our communities.**

TO MEMORIZE OR NOT TO MEMORIZE

Bob Woodland, AMCA historian, has given a very thorough account of this very controversial subject:

Back in 1936, AGCA conductors discussed what was referred to as "a much-debated topic", namely Sheet Music versus Memorization. Neither the Editorial Board nor the Association Executive wanted to grapple with the subject, so it was handed over to the editor of *The Keynote* at the time, Al Hanson. Al passed it on to the conductors for their comments, then tabulated and categorized the results in an interesting article.

As we approach another singing season in AMCA, **sixty-six years later**, the debate continues. The 2002-2003 season brings with it several important events that make this debate very timely: District Sings throughout our organization during the season, and our International Big Sing next April in Lansing, Michigan. Let us see what our choral conductors of days gone by had to say on the subject.

Here's some from the holding music school.

- ✓ *Every time we have tried to memorize a group of songs we have darned near wrecked a concert, so I am distinctly from Missouri with a wide-open mind.*
- ✓ *In the performance of two or three 'memorized' concerts, I have never felt we were getting the full efficiency of our chorus. There were always (about) twenty-five percent who were waiting for 'George' to do it . . . The entire performance lacked that confidence-so necessary.*
- ✓ *(I agree with) this fundamental step forward, but given just so much time at rehearsals, shall we neglect tone, pitch, and interpretation for memory drill? I do not think it wise.*
- ✓ *How far can the average man go and still find pleasure in music? Since men sing for pleasure, relaxation and inspiration, if memorizing is stressed unduly, many will drop out.*

And here are some comments from the other side:

- ✓ *Experience has taught us that memorized music results in better posture, freer tone production, focused attention-and these in turn result in more expressive singing.*
- ✓ *The Orpheus would never return to the use of music in public appearances. They all realize they can do much better work by giving their entire attention to their conductor.*
- ✓ *No reason for the use of music in public except that it is too much work to memorize it. There is no way to sing properly with music in hand instead of in head and heart.*

For the complete article from Bob, visit our website and you can also cast a ballot regarding your opinion on this controversial subject. As we say in politics, "vote early and vote often!"

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