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## Choral Society marks 75 years of song

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By **DOROTHY ANDRIES** Contributor

The North Shore Choral Society's diamond anniversary program will be a sweeping retrospective of the organization's 75 years. "We have a piece from each decade," said music director Julia Davids. "We were lucky. The society kept great records, so I was able to create a wonderful program."

Davids, who lives in Skokie, is in her second year as music director of the 75 year old 140-voice community ensemble, and she discovered many treasures digging through three-quarters of a century's worth of programs. "We're opening the concert with Randall Thompson's 'Alleluia,' which we've sung nine times," she explained, "and we are doing two works that were commissioned for the 50th anniversary of the choral society."

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**North Shore Choral Society today.**

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**The North Shore Choral Society presented a concert in Evanston's Saint Luke's Episcopal Church in May, 1996.**

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**North Shore Choral Society members and distant cousins John Darrow and Myra Sieck found that their family played an important part in HSCS's history. | Photo by Lenore Dupuis**

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**Inge Kistler, (left), who documented North Shore Choral's history from 1936-1995 shares a copy with Music Director Dr. Julia Davids. | Photo by Lenore Dupuis**

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**The North Shore Choral Society in 1962.**

The 50th anniversary pieces include the sixth movement of "The Geometry of Music" by Donald Draganski of Evanston, who sang for a time for the chorus and wrote its program notes for 25 years, and the Epilogue from "A Reason for Singing" written by the late Dan Tucker, also of Evanston. The program notes the two men wrote for their pieces 25 years ago will be used in the program.

## Singing along

Anne Heider, director of choral ensembles at Roosevelt University where she is also an associate professor, has written a piece for the 75th anniversary. Titled "Pleasure Tunes My Tongue," it was commissioned by David Hunt, a bass in the chorus. "That's going to be a sing-a-long," Davids declared, offering just enough information to stimulate the curiosity of the society's fans.

Heider, who is artistic director emeritus of Bella Voce, also did a new arrangement of Stephen Foster's "O Susanna." "That was one of the earliest pieces on this program," Davids added. "We sang it in 1939 and in 1955."

Through the years the singers have performed large choral works in their entirety multiple times, including "Elijah" by Mendelssohn four times, "Requiem" by Faure four times, and "The Creation" by Haydn six times. Portions from all three will be on the upcoming concert, with solo parts sung by Corey Grigg. The young baritone, who is finishing his master's degree at Northwestern University, is the winner of the first North Shore Choral Society's Donald Chen Young Artist Award, named for the group's longest serving conductor who led the choral society from 1984 to 2009.

Selections from Copland's enormously popular "Old American Songs" are on the program. "At the River" and "Zion's Walls" will be sung by the chorus, while Grigg will present "The Pretty Little Horses" and "I Bought Me a Cat." He will also be soloist in the spiritual "Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit," arranged by African-American composer William Dawson, who established the School of Music at Tuskegee University in Alabama.

Accompanist will be Sharon Rich Peterson, who has accompanied the singers since 1979.

## Distinguished history

A thorough history of the society from its official beginning in 1936 to 1995 was written by Inge Kistler of Evanston. "It took me a year to finish it," explained Kistler, who has been singing alto in the North Shore Choral Society since 1969. "Fortunately I was general manager of the chorus at the time and was able to connect with past directors and many people who were in the chorus long ago."

Contact was by regular mail. "I just sent them letters," she said, "and I got a response from everyone I could find." Her enthusiasm about the chorus remains unabated. "It is the prime activity in my life now," she said, adding "Most of the things on the program I have sung at least once with the chorus."

Though the chorus marks its anniversary from 1936, it developed from a male-only vocal ensemble established in Winnetka in the spring of 1932 by Lawrence Yingling, then supervisor of music in the Winnetka schools. By September, however, women had been added and the first concert was given at the Winnetka Community House on Dec. 18 of that year, which included a Christmas sing-a-long. Subsequently holiday and spring concerts were given, with a spring concert in 1935 performed in the garden of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Sieck.

For 10 seasons beginning in the spring of 1936 the ensemble, then known by its present name, was conducted by Madi Bacon, a music teacher, founder and director of the Elizabeth Madrigal Singers in Chicago. She had studied piano with Ernest Bloch and did advanced work in conducting with Serge Koussevsky at Tanglewood. For several years the spring concert continued to be given in the Siecks' garden.

Chorus, the Edgewater Male Chorus and the American Opera company, and from 1960 to 1965 it was led by Vincent B. Allison, who held music degrees from Harvard and Yale and was head of the music department at North Shore Country Day School.

Allison conducted Bach's St. Matthew Passion, Brahms' German Requiem and Bach's St John Passion, accompanied by orchestras in Winnetka and Lake Forest. Additional directors have been Ronald Schweitzer 1965 to 1971, Richard Rosewall from 1971 to 1973, David Larson from 1973 to 1984, and Donald Chen, who served from 1984 to 2009.

The connection with the Sieck family continues to this day. John Darrow of Evanston, who has sung tenor in the choral society for 16 years, counts Florence Sieck as his great aunt. Also in the choir is Myra Sieck. "She is a cousin by marriage," he explained, "so the family is still well-represented."

Darrow, who is vice president of the society's board of directors, is in charge of the silent auction and cash raffle which will be available at 6:15 p.m. before the concert, during intermission and the champagne and dessert reception following the concert. To date, premiums include a golf foursome in Lake Geneva, several dinner/theater packages with Northlight and Next theaters, a conducting lesson with Julia Davids, and a chance to conduct a number during the society's December concert.

The long-time member is particularly delighted with the work Julia Davids is doing with the ensemble. "She is a singer herself," he said, "and she has done so much to improve our sound. Plus she has experience working with groups and budgets, so it is easy for the board to work with her."

## Community music

"The chorus is a great community resource," he continued. "We have accomplished singers and those who are new to group singing."

And everything else in between. For example Karl Kroger and his wife Marie of Gurnee have been singing bass and alto respectively in the chorus since the fall of 2000. "We sang in the Boulder Chorale when we lived in Colorado," Karl explained. "and when we moved here we looked for a chorus to join."

They read in the Gurnee Review about a program by the North Shore Choral Society in May of 2000. "They were doing a Haydn Mass at St. Luke's in Evanston and we went," he continued. "We were very impressed." They auditioned in the fall and have been singing with the chorus ever since.

"I think everyone will find something to like about this anniversary concert," Karl said, to which Marie added, "I think they will find many things to like."

Davids summed her feeling about the concert by quoting a line from Tucker's "A Reason for Singing," which reads "Since singing is so good a thing, I wish all men could learn to sing."

North Shore Choral Society, 75th Anniversary Concert

7 p.m. Saturday Feb. 12. Unitarian Church of Evanston, 1330 Ridge Ave. Advance tickets \$22, senior \$20, student \$12; at door \$25, \$22 and \$15. (773) 956-8400 or visit [www.northshorechoral.org](http://www.northshorechoral.org)