

The Year in Review

Another great year with the chorus is coming to a close. I have had a great year as Executive Secretary. Though I must admit, when I signed on for this position, I had no idea that it would involve chaperoning 60 tuxedoed men, or discussing the ideal degree of t-shirt cling for the firefighters at an AIDS fundraiser - not that I'm complaining!

The year started off with lessons in how to have a good time, Suomi-style. In the first two weeks we hosted not one, but TWO Finnish choirs! Both choirs gave spectacular concerts, but it was their performances at the Duke of York afterwards that were most memorable. When else would I get to hear 60 tuxedoed men sing raucous Russian folk songs in the men's room or an entire women's choir perform "The Masochist's Tango" in Italian, on patio tables, with actions?! Needless to say, I never expected I'd find myself phoning on a Sunday night, trying to figure out what to do with a Finnish men's choir ("Hello, Brass Rail? My name is Ruth Lavergne, I'm executive secretary of the Hart House Chorus . . ."). We got great feedback afterwards, though: following their visit, it was confirmed that out of Harvard, Yale, and even Miami, we showed them the best time.

The next main Chorus event was the Hart House farm weekend, and as always it was a lot of fun. As it was Halloween weekend, we had the obligatory costume contest and bobbing for donuts on piggyback .



Choristers bobbing for donuts at our Halloween party - Hart House Farm. *Photo: F. Chow*

Sauna and pond jumping were as exhilarating (read: stupidly hot and then stupidly cold) as ever. Sadly, I missed the Scottish Country Dancing, but I hear that it kept everyone on their toes.

A definite highlight for me was our performance at the Canadian Foundation for Aids Research (CANFAR) fundraiser gala. At the planning committee meeting that Meghan Roberts and I attended, there was a very heated discussion about the ideal tightness of the t-shirts being ordered for the junior firemen who would serve as doormen. Unfortunately, no such issue came up in chorus committee meetings this year. The CANFAR event itself was a blast. The combination of a great cause, singing a kitschy show-tune, an open Tequila bar, male go-go dancers in hot pants, and late-night fisticuffs in the music room (don't ask), made it a Wednesday night to remember.



Ruth (right) with Catherine and Whitney at the CANFAR fundraiser. *Photo: B. Farrol*

As always, the Inter-Varsity Choral Festival was wonderful weekend. The Saturday night dance party fever is a highlight for me every year. I think they managed to play every singly cheesy dance anthem in one night (go Boney M!) and I am always astounded by the amazing dance skills of the Hart House Chorus. We totally show all of the 'youngins' from the other schools how to get down. Special mention has to go to Peter Manson, as he did not sit out a single song the whole night long. He is a model for us all.

As you may have gathered, I have had a great time serving as Executive Secretary this year, but the day-to-day running of

the chorus it isn't all open bars and go-go dancers (sad, but true). I must take this opportunity to thank the hardworking and dedicated group of committee members who are responsible for the success of all of these events, as well as our regular concerts, Remembrance Day, and Peace Week performances. I have been so very fortunate to work with them, and I can't thank them enough for all of their hard work.

Ruth Lavergne - Executive Secretary

The Finnish Invasion

In September, the Hart House Chorus hosted two choirs from Finland. The first was from Turku and was composed of a male choir and female choir named Brahe Djäkär & Florakören. Their visit consisted of touring, shopping, hanging out with Choristers at the pub, and a moving performance (with an element of theatre) held in the Great Hall.

The second choir was Akademiska Sångföreningen (aka The Academic Male Voice Choir of Helsinki). This male choir started their three-city tour in Toronto and appeared to take every opportunity to enjoy themselves. A group of them were able to see our Maple Leafs and Raptors play. Their visit also involved touring, hanging out with Choristers at the pub, and a performance at Hart House.



Visiting Finnish choirs Brahe Djäkär & Florakören performing in the Great Hall

Both choirs will be remembered for taking over the Duke of York pub with their presence and impromptu songs. They will also be remembered for serenading several of our female choristers. Maybe another choir tour to Finland should be arranged!?

UofT Peace Week

A group of Hart House choristers participated in UofT's fourth annual Peace Week. Peace Week featured a program of presentations, forums, music, and art to create a culture of peace. Choristers started the week performing Vaughan Williams pieces at an intimate concert held at St. Hilda's College. Near the end of the week, the Chorus continued its annual tradition of performing at the Remembrance Day ceremony held at the Soldier's Tower on the St. George campus.

You Gotta Have HART !

On Wednesday November 30th, thirty current and former choristers performed for the charitable organisation Canadian Foundation for Aids Research (CANFAR) in the elaborately decorated Great Hall of Hart House. The Chorus' own programme advisor Meghan Roberts led us in song to Finzi's *My Spirit Sang All Day*, and an excerpt from *You Gotta Have Heart*.



Christoph with Stephanie and Pam at CANFAR

After the performance, choristers changed into their formal attire and enjoyed the food, drink, dance, the HART Throb dancers, and spotting celebrities such as Justin Trudeau, and Farley Flex from Canadian Idol. The funds raised from this evening's performance will be used to subsidise the Chorus' next tour.

Fall Concert

This fall, the Hart House Chorus performed up to its usual high standards with a concert featuring a broad repertoire of a cappella works from across Europe and parts of North America. The pieces were mostly folksongs and songs inspired by nature with one beautiful non-secular piece thrown in to keep the audience guessing.

With the Great Hall packed tightly, and only the occasional sound effect coming

in through the outer windows, the microphones were hot and the chorus was primed. Instead of merely recording the audio for our chorus CDs, however, a precedent was set this year with a first-time live broadcast over the internet! This webcast successfully transmitted both sounds and visuals across the world, with confirmed viewers from as far off as New Zealand.

The concert began with a tribute to the homeland of Czech composer Antonín Dvořák through his five *Songs of Nature*. This song cycle was composed in 1882 using poems by Vítězslav Hálek to express the love he had of the countryside in which he was raised.

The next piece was the haunting eight-part choral adaptation by the American composer Samuel Barber of his own *Adagio for Strings*, entitled *Agnus Dei*. Perhaps his most well-known piece and definitely a favourite of choral ensembles world-wide, it is considered by many to be one of the "saddest classical" works ever produced.

A Gaelic folksong was next, arranged by Brian Trant and entitled *An Eriskey Love Lilt*, after the island in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland from which it originated. This was followed by three British folksongs arranged by Ralph Vaughan Williams called *The Turtle Dove*, *Ca' The Yowes*, and *The Lover's Ghost*.

After the intermission, the chorus opened with an experimental piece by R. Murray Shafer called *Epitaph for Moonlight*. This was a piece composed with the aid of grade seven students and written down in a unique graphical format. It was written as a response to the lunar landing and was meant to re-inspire the wonder and mystery of the moon.

Zoltán Kodály, one of the most prominent Hungarian composers, wrote the next piece called *Evening*. This was his first choral work, written when he was twenty years old to the words of a poem by his teacher and celebrating the titular beauty of his homeland.

The *Skidegate Love Song*, arranged by Chatman, is a Haida folksong from the Queen Charlotte Islands in British Columbia which describes the loneliness and sadness of a broken heart. The last set was a collection of *Four Folksongs from the British Isles* arranged by Louis Halsey, with a piece from Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and England.

Many thanks again to our fantastic conductor John Tuttle, assistant conductors Alistair Wood and Alexandra Haninec, our soloists Whitney Hahn, Laurel Perkins, Meredith White, and Duncan Smith, and of course our talented accompanist Marty Smyth whose fingers got a rest during the concert.

Loïc Markley – Concert Manager

Assistant Conductors



Alexandra Haninec has been playing the piano since she was seven years old, and received her A.R.C.T.

diploma in piano performance at the age of seventeen. During her human biology undergraduate at the University of Toronto, Alexandra continued studying piano privately with Nancy Hou. In 2004, she became a vocal music instructor with the Toronto Catholic District School Board, where she had the opportunity to be the musical director of two elementary school choirs. Alexandra holds a Master of Science from the Department of Medical Biophysics at the University of Toronto, and is currently a pre-service teacher education candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT).



Alistair Wood's previous conducting experiences include a brief stint directing his high school concert

band. Alistair started playing the piano at the age of six. He switched to organ after completing his grade 9 in piano at the Royal Conservatory of Music in 1998. He is currently taking organ lessons from William Maddox of Yorkminster Park Baptist Church. Alistair has supplied as organist and choir director at several local churches. Alistair is currently pursuing a Master of Applied Science degree at the University of Toronto's Institute for Aerospace Studies.

John Tuttle – Inspiring Hart House Choristers for Twenty-Five Years

by Suzanne Brooks

When watching the Hart House Chorus perform, the rapport between John Tuttle and his choir is hard to miss. They are responsive, engaged, highly accomplished, and clearly enjoying themselves. On the occasion of John's 25th anniversary as conductor of the Chorus, I asked him to reflect on what the experience has meant from his perspective.

John's tenure with the Chorus began in 1981, when he took over the job from Denise Narcisse-Mair. He tells me that at that time he was very impressed with the "unique and beautiful sound" that the Chorus had, and was somewhat worried about his ability to make the choir sound the way that Denise had. Nonetheless, he applied for the job "on a lark" – and twenty-five years later, hundreds of inspired young people are glad he did.

The Chorus' many accomplishments under John include being finalists in the CBC Choral Competition and undertaking successful tours of England (1985), Scandinavia (1999) and Eastern Europe (2003). But perhaps most important has been the Chorus' contribution to campus life, through participation in Hart House's annual Remembrance Day ceremony, and through their popular bi-annual concerts in the Great Hall.

A few of these concerts stand out in John's mind, such as a performance of Mozart's Requiem in November 2000. He picked the piece partially because the film *Amadeus* was popular at the time, but says he underestimated the appeal of the music: "the place was mobbed – there was no place to hang from!" Another highlight John mentions is performing Ralph Vaughan Williams' *G-mass* on several occasions. It's a piece that he tells me has been in the repertoire a long time, and is a "good vehicle for the choir". How fitting, then, that the Chorus should perform this work at this year's spring concert.

When I ask John about some of his fondest memories with the Chorus, he reflects that "one of the joys of the job is watching people grow in other ways besides musicianship". He talks of the leadership opportunities provided by the Chorus' Executive Committee, and speaks with particular pride of former Executive Secretaries and Assistant Conductors who have gone on to important musical administrative positions around the world. One example is Sarah MacDonald, Director of Music in Chapel, Selwyn College, Cambridge, who when asked is quick to credit John's training for shaping her career.



Photo: Gary Ray Rush

Another obvious joy for John is the remarkable tendency of Hart House Chorus members to form romantic attachments to one another. "It's been fun watching couples in the Chorus. I've seen many of them have families – it's been a while!" He recalls one particularly colourful experience involving former chorister Anne Yakabowski's wedding in Kirkland Lake. Ever the adventurous pilot, John decided to fly himself up for the wedding. "The scary part was that we went to the airport and it was fogged in. Fortunately the fog lifted in time to get us to Kirkland Lake before the wedding!"

The Hart House Chorus is only one of John's musical pursuits. His award-winning Exultate Chamber Singers, which include several former Hart House Chorus members, are also celebrating their 25th anniversary season. Hart House choristers can also be found singing in the choirs of St Thomas's Church, where John is organist and choirmaster.

Still more got their musical start with John during his days as conductor of the Canadian Children's Opera Chorus. In recognition of all his work, John was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Sacred Letters from Trinity College in 2005. Wonderfully, his influence extends far beyond his personal reach, by way of former Choristers who continue to touch hundreds of lives with music. Some of their thoughts are included here.

Looking back on the Chorus' success under his leadership, John tells me with characteristic humility that its high standard has "little to do with the conductor", citing other factors such as the acoustic quality of the Great Hall, and the remarkable "continuity of membership". However, as countless members of the Chorus over the past twenty-five years would surely agree, that continuity of membership is not a coincidence. John's unique ability to keep rehearsals fun while still maintaining a very focussed environment, all the while fostering musical excellence and camaraderie among singers, make it easy to understand why choristers keep coming back year after year. Hart House, the University of Toronto and the broader musical community are richer because of it.

Suzanne Brooks is a former assistant conductor of the Hart House Chorus, has sung with the Exultate Chamber Singers, and is a soprano lead at St. Thomas's Church.



Hart House Chorus, 1981. Photo: Janice Kerkkamp

IVCF – Queens University, Kingston

Queens University hosted this year's Inter-Varsity Choral Festival which was held on the weekend of February 3-5. The Hart House Chorus participated in this annual festival with university choirs from Western, Trent, McGill, and the host choir Queens.



Ready to perform at St. George's Cathedral, Kingston. Photo: R. Levere

This year's IVCF felt unique. Many Chorus members I spoke to said that they had an especially fun time at this year's IVCF. Perhaps it was the icebreaker at the Merchant MacLiam Pub (which was within crawling distance from our waterfront hotel). Perhaps it was the mass rehearsals at St. George's Cathedral where Hart House choristers shared their talents with equally-talented choristers from other choirs. There were enjoyable workshops which included Samba, the Alexander Technique, Musical Disorders, and even Belly dancing. Perhaps it was the delicious dinner and heart-racing dance music at the Saturday evening banquet. It could have been the mass choral piece *Lux Aeterna* - wonderfully performed on the Sunday afternoon at the Cathedral.



Partying it up at the IVCF banquet and dance.

There are many reasons, but one thing is for sure - Hart House choristers had a great time. We look forward to next year's Festival, which will be hosted by the University of Western Ontario in London.

Chorister Memories of John

"John doesn't change, does he? He hasn't changed in all these years. What can we say about John?"

When I was first in the choir we went on a trip to Quebec, Kingston and Montreal. We stayed in a church basement in Quebec City. Sandi McDonald [ed: then Executive Secretary] let out the air in John's sleeping mattress. John was close to the age of the choir – it was like being at camp!"

Peter Manson, Chorus member since 1983

"John was and still is both a teacher and mentor for me...I am grateful for the opportunities to conduct that I was given, my first regular opportunities with a "real" choir where I could work on my skills as a conductor. Finally, I will always remember fondly our tour to England in the summer of 1985..."

Thanks also to Diana Tuttle for saving my life when I looked the wrong way crossing the street and almost got run over by a cab!"

Peter Nikiforuk, Director of Music, St Peters Lutheran Church, Kitchener; Artistic Director, Menno Singers



John and his wife Diana taking a nap on U.K. tour – 1985. Photo: J. Armstrong

"At my re-audition for the choir after my first year, I recall the ear-tests: John put his whole forearm on the piano, producing a chord cluster taking in about two octaves, and asked me to sing the middle note!"

One of the first pieces John made me conduct was the "Alleluia Psallat" by Peter Aston (b. 1938), which changes time signature from 7/8 to 5/8 to 3/4 all over the place. I remember at least one very painful rehearsal, where I simply couldn't beat time accurately for it, and for the whole rehearsal I had to rest my arm on John's and let him do all the work."

Sarah MacDonald, Director of Music, Selwyn College, Cambridge

"It was the IVCF hosted by Queen's University in February, 1989. In the morning we heard the Queen's choir rehearse with their conductor - they sounded quite good. Their conductor, however, was very ill; he had pneumonia and could not participate in the rest of the weekend. The question remained as to would to conduct the Queen's choir...John Tuttle agreed, and had a half-hour rehearsal with them in the afternoon.

That rehearsal was amazing! In half an hour John transformed that choir's performances of their chosen pieces. At first some members of the Queen's choir balked at the subtle changes that John suggested, but soon they caught on, and their eventual performance under John's direction was magical. Those of us from Hart House who observed the rehearsal were so proud of John.

Janice Kerckamp, alto section lead, St Thomas's Church; long-time member of the Exultate Chamber Singers

Sing-along Messiah

On Sunday December 18th, twenty choristers and friends made their way into the crowded Massey Hall to hear and participate in Handel's Messiah performed by Tafelmusik conducted by Handel (Ivar Tabuns) himself.

Although the hall was sectioned into the various SATB parts, the Hart House Choristers elected to have their own ensemble in the middle of the Hall which made the runs in 'Unto Us A Child Is Born' sound angelic. This may be a start of a holiday tradition.

Chorus Alumnus? Contribute to Archives...

The Hart House Chorus is the oldest surviving club at Hart House, and we would like to better preserve our history.

We're looking for old Chorus items, such as:

- past programmes
- posters, flyers, stickers
- pins, buttons, caps, T-shirts
- former membership lists
- tour material
- photographs

Please contact Meghan Roberts
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