



THE VOICE

*December 1, 2009
Stratford Concert Choir
V.1 – First Edition*

Welcome

by Helen Harrison, Editor

It is a privilege to welcome you to this, the first edition of The Voice.

Through this newsletter we invite you to sit back, relax and get to know us a little better. In each edition we hope to profile one of the choir members, to let you know about upcoming events and provide you with a bit of information to enhance your enjoyment of the concert, and to entertain you with a bit of humour or a touch of nostalgia.

In this issue we are proud to profile Ruth Diegel-Beisel, to provide a humorous trip down memory lane with Rob McEwen, and to share an interesting glimpse into the history of the Messiah.

We would appreciate any feedback you have to offer either about the newsletter or about our concerts. Please send comments to hharrison@cyg.net.

“Messiah: a Personal Glimpse”

by Ian Sadler

Messiah has always held a very special place in my heart. Since the age of 8, I have been involved annually in Christmastime performances - for the first 5 years as a chorister at St. Paul's Cathedral and thereafter as either accompanist or conductor. The music and the words have always thrilled me and so it was a particular delight and pleasure 21 years ago to find myself in Dublin, the city where Messiah was first performed.

Every musical dictionary mentions Fishamble Street in Dublin, as being the site of the first performance of the Messiah. I was in Dublin during the summer of 1988 to perform as a finalist in the International Organ Competition held at Christ Church Cathedral. Fishamble is a short little street rising at the east end of the Cathedral, and so on a sunny July afternoon, I found myself striding up Fishamble Street in excited anticipation of seeing the “sight”.

“Just go up the hill at the back of the Cathedral and you will see the gateway on the left – can't miss it!”

The policeman was absolutely correct in his brief directions to the site of the little concert hall where Handel had first directed Messiah. About half way up the little hill on the left hand side 2 large stone pillars came into view – the entrance! When I reached the gateway, the iron gates were open and a courtyard lay beyond. I walked in expecting to behold a beautiful little concert hall, but alas, on the very site there was now a mechanic's garage.

“Come to pick up a car, gov?”

I explained to the gentleman in the overalls what I had come seeking.

“We get a lot of visitors looking for the old concert hall.”



THE VOICE

He explained that while the old concert hall was now gone, the present edifice had been built on the original stone foundation. I peered inside the garage and tried to visualize what this spot must have looked like 250 years ago. Despite the noise and the fumes it was interesting to get a sense of the original size of the performance space and it was nice to know that this stone foundation had once resonated to Handel's fine score.

When I stand in Central United Church in Stratford, my sense is that the size of its sanctuary is very similar to that of the original concert hall. Apparently because so many people wished to attend the first performance, space was so limited that the gentlemen were asked not to wear their swords and the ladies to omit the wearing of hoops beneath their dresses. We will not be making a similar request for our performance!

At 8:00 pm on Saturday December 12th at Central United Church here in Stratford, you will have the opportunity to hear this treasured masterpiece. The performance will be very much in line with the first performance in Dublin - a similar size of performance space, a chorus of 100 voices and 4 soloists accompanied by a chamber orchestra of strings, trumpets and drums. We hope you will come out to enjoy the music.



Editor's note:
Tickets for the Messiah are \$20 in advance, \$22 at the door.
It is still a good deal to buy our season's tickets at \$75 for the remaining 4 concerts.
For tickets contact any choir member or call 393-6879.



Of Strings and Picks

by Rob McEwen

I slid the completed test across the table to the visitor, its trip briefly interrupted by a tacky spot that had not been thoroughly wiped after the evening's meal. A slight tug and it was free again leaving a small, thin layer of paper that my mother started to self-consciously pick at with her fingernail. It was a quiz consisting of multiple choice plus true and false questions.

This odd thin man who earlier had knocked on our door was from a music conservatory that was offering lessons in town to which only a select number of young people who achieved a top level grade would be admitted. After a moment of scrutiny of my paper he peered over his miniscule glasses and announced that I had successfully concluded the examination with what appeared to be an astonishingly high mark.

Mom beamed at me as she scraped a bit of the offending paper from under her nail. The two of them sat down to discuss the details of the lessons.





THE VOICE

3.

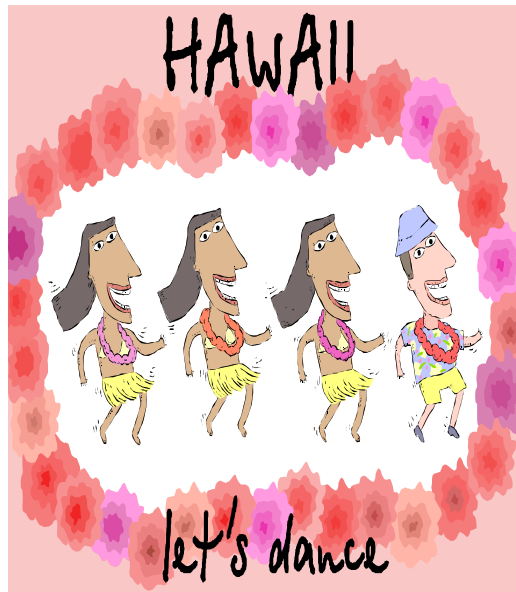
I was to learn the guitar. but not just any “run-of the mill” guitar. I was to study the Hawaiian guitar.



As I look back, I imagine these lessons were the yin yang for our family, as both of my sisters had received piano lessons six years earlier and now I was being included in the artistic discretionary end of things.

That first weekend I set off walking to the hall on the far side of town where the course would be taught. In those days parents rarely drove their children anywhere. Nor did they hover over them watching their every move like security cameras in a convenience store. We just managed to leave and return on our own.

The chosen twenty of us sat in a circle. Our first session was exciting as we received our loaner guitars, the steel tone bar, the various finger picks and music. We learned the tuning and playing gradually with each successive Saturday.



Dad soon tired of the monotonous hour long practice every day as I slid the tone bar back and forth along the strings rather like the sound of sharpening knives prior to the turkey carving. Our cat would head to the basement perhaps as a comment on the quality of my playing.

The days came and went until finally the concert arrived. It was a seemingly formal affair where parents sat around and pointed out their child to the parent next to them while they in turn nodded politely. Each of us played our well rehearsed pieces.

And as the piano had ended for my sisters when their interest waned, so too did my lessons cease. The recital over, the guitar was carefully packed in its case along with picks and bar and handed back to the teacher. No offer was made to continue. The Hawaiian guitar lessons were moving along to the next town.

Every now and then I recall this experience and ponder what I had accomplished in that brief period of my youth; not that anything is missing in my life now, but there is always that fleeting thought of “If only”.

Occasionally I sit back and think to myself that had I kept up the lessons and the practising, that just possibly, “I could've had class; I could've been a contender; I could've been somebody; I could've been....Don Ho.”



Ruth Diegel-Beisel's Life-long Musical Journey

By Amanda Gray Vander Ploeg

Ruth Diegel-Beisel is a musical gem among us. Chatting with Ruth gives you a sense of calm sincerity and genuine friendliness. Music seems to accompany every step she takes.

Ruth has been a member of the Stratford Concert Choir since its inception 28 years ago in 1981. Her strong soprano voice is a blend of purity and sweetness. She has been a featured soloist several times with the Stratford Concert Choir, most recently in October 2009 when she took us on a 'Sentimental Journey'. She has a soul that is reminiscent of years gone by – a nostalgia we didn't know we missed.

Before the SCC was in existence, Ruth sang with the K-W Philharmonic Choir directed by Howard Dyck for 9 years.

Flashback to the late 1920's, with its vibrant feel-good jazz music that never failed to get everybody dancing. Born in Mitchell, Ruth started singing at the time when most kids are still learning their words. She stood up in Main Street United Church when she was three years old and belted out "Jesus Loves Me". That was just the beginning as she was soon singing with the junior and then the senior choir.

Ruth came by her musicality honestly. Her father, Franklin Moore, was a tenor soloist in the area. She has wonderful memories of standing around the piano singing with her parents and grandparents. She took piano lessons from the extremely talented Cora B. Ahrens. Ruth would take the bus from Mitchell to Stratford for her lessons and got her grade 8 certificate with Miss Ahrens. Ruth says she stills plays when she gets a chance for her "own amusement." There is always music in her home.

While Ruth attended high school in Mitchell she met her sweetheart, Glenn Diegel. They both played basketball and were cast opposite each other in several of the school's musicals. Ruth and Glenn were often compared to Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy! The demand for the two sweethearts increased, and they started a 7 piece big band orchestra with piano, trumpet and soloist.

This grew into the 10 piece Glenn Williams Orchestra, which played throughout southwestern Ontario. From 1945 until 1955, Ruth and Glenn and friends played in Stratford, Kincardine, Grand Bend and Listowel, to name a few. Highlights for Ruth include the Pavilion on the beach in Grand



Bend, and the "Blue Room" in Stratford on Wellington Street. Glenn and Ruth were married in 1950. Their 5 children and 12 grandchildren still love to listen to the one record made by The Glen Williams Orchestra.



Ruth went to Stratford's Normal School and for 3 years taught at USS1 Hibbert country school on Highway 8, which had been built by her grandfather and where many family members had also taught.



THE VOICE

5.

In 1961, Ruth recalls a variety show she starred in at the Avon Theatre called “Cor Blimey”. It was written by John Stratton and his wife Rita, with Joan Gaffney as musical director. John asked Ruth if she could roller skate. She answered, “Well yes. Why??” In this fundraiser for the Kinsmen, Ruth started the show wearing a long white dress and a tiara, but also, unknown to the audience, wearing roller skates. She sang “My Wonderful One”. After the song was finished, she hoisted her skirts revealing red flannels and skated off the stage. She certainly gave the audience a surprise and still laughs remembering those sold out performances!

Ruth lost her husband Glenn to cancer in 1980 at the age of 52. After being widowed 7 years, she married friend and neighbour Stan Beisel, who passed away 3 years ago.

Ruth says music has always been great therapy. It has helped her through the hard times – caring for 2 husbands and her mother, who died March 5, 2009 in her 103rd year. She has a strong faith and feels music is her greatest ministry. She has lent her voice to funerals, weddings, anniversaries and many church services. She has been a part of many chorale groups and choirs including ones in Florida, Bermuda and Ireland.

Last November (2008) marked an emotional highlight for Ruth. It was the 100th anniversary of the Stratford Normal School and she was invited to sing “Bless This House.” Five hundred former students and masters gathered for the celebration. This was the place where she, as a student, had performed in “*Oklahoma*” and where later her husband Stan was a Master. There was a spirit of pride, nostalgia, joy and thankfulness as the words to “Bless This House” were sung, and an overwhelming standing ovation when she concluded. Ruth says it was a “truly humbling experience.”

In 2002, Ruth received The Beacon Herald runner-up “Citizen of the Year” Award.

Ruth still lives in the home she and her husband Glenn built together on Huntingdon Street here in Stratford. For Ruth, music and faith are very much intertwined and she hopes to continue to share her great faith with others through her music.

We in the choir are pleased and privileged to know and sing with Ruth, the lady who makes music every chance she gets!





THE VOICE

6.

The Voice Newsletter Staff:

Editor: Helen Harrison

Artistic Layout: Linda Whiting

Contributors, to this Edition:

Rob McEwen.....*Of Strings and Picks*

Amanda Gray Vander Ploeg.....*profile of Ruth Diegel-Beisel*

Ian Sadler, SCC Artistic Director.....*Messiah: A Personal Glimpse*



The Stratford Concert Choir wishes to publicly
acknowledge the
following Corporate Sponsors:

**Marklevitz Architects Inc., James Stock Auctions, Investment Planning Counsel (Bill McBride),
RBS Dominion Securities, Lannin Electric & Mechanical and Stewart Patterns**

The Stratford Concert Choir also acknowledges the faithful support that
has been received from benefactors in the community as well as the
continuing support of our own choir members.

Without all of you.....there would be no Stratford Concert Choir.

The SCC is pleased to announce the formation of a Fund-Raising Committee made up of
choir members and other community supporters. The Committee will be engaging in
outreach to invite involvement from the community to support the funding of soloists,
orchestral accompaniment, and the continued encouragement of choral music in Stratford.
The choir is looking forward to what this initiative will enable us to do.

**Thank you to all those who may not have been mentioned but
have contributed to the launching of this First Edition of The Voice.**



*The Staff of "The Voice"
wish you and your family
a most Joyous & Peaceful Holiday Season*

Merry Christmas