

Life as a singer

I don't know if choral culture has ever been written about, but I think of how much it connects me to people away from my house, and drives me into the city.

I sing in two choirs, a Catholic church in Minneapolis and a synagogue choir in Minnetonka.

Scheduling for rehearsals and performances are quite convenient because I rehearse with one on Tuesday and the other on Wednesday. Tuesday's rehearsal prepares us for Shabbat services Friday, and Wednesday's prepares us for Sunday services every week.

You might think, "Why on earth would a Jew sing in a Catholic choir?" And I would happily retort, "Because I am a weird Jew."

I have said that to a couple of people and they always laugh, but it is true.

Besides being a professional stained glass artist, I am also a vocal musician. For 35 years I have sung in multiple choirs at any given time because I get to perform some of the richest repertoire ever written for the church, dating back centuries to modern day compositions.

For most of my life, I sang in three choirs; a temple choir, a church choir, and a professional ensemble. That's nine hours of rehearsal every week, not including performances and doing recordings. Dedicated choir singers like me are by nature road warriors

Musings of a Transplant

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who travel umpteen miles for the experience.

The people who sing in choirs lead otherwise dedicated lives in various professions, but singing is a passion they can't live without, and choir at a church or synagogue fulfills that function.

That is one common attribute everyone shares. The most lionine and celebrated individuals, who are doctors, surgeons, lawyers, engineers, artists, etc., sing in choirs and make up the most uniquely-bound people on the planet.

Do we, the public, know anything about them? Not very much, except a reference once in a while, almost as a cast away thought, "He/she sings in a choir."

I can't think of a book, television show, or movie which has penetrated the culture of singing in a choir because it is a fascinating commitment to group thinking and feeling that is quite unlike any other experience of social interaction.

There are moments in performance doing difficult repertoire, for example, we call it "white knuckle time," when a 40-voice choir can soar with perfection, as if all souls and brains are joined as one and it becomes a group mo-

ment of immense joy and delight.

That quality of choir singing is attained through rigorous rehearsals every week, working as an ensemble. We work on pitch acuity, enunciation, breath control, and blending. That's the technical stuff, but we work on other things, too, equally important.

We are first and foremost a spiritual community, joined as one, caring for one another as if we are direct members of a family.

Birthdays, illnesses, death, disappointments of life, encouragement, solidarity for one's personal dignity are all recognized and affirmed. When I feel down in the dumps, I force myself to go to rehearsal because I know in five minutes I am where I am supposed to be—with my friends, making music, doing serious soul work together.

This has been a difficult winter for me and my husband. Job searching is, thankfully, behind us. But all during that time, my husband drove me to rehearsals and performances and sat somewhere close by working on a laptop.

He is known as my "choir widow," always shadowing me whenever I am singing. Both my husband, and choir singing have sustained me through the grey days and I never take them for granted, ever.