

Sections

view

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Recently: Hitting new highs

By [Staff](#)

January 3, 2008 | Posted in: [Arts & Music](#), [Community](#) | Comments closed



By Valarie Schwartz

It was not as an interloper that I sang during the first rehearsal of the Women's Voices Chorus on Sept. 3. Being amidst them seemed like a good way to learn how accepting the women were going to be of their new director, Allan Friedman — the first man involved with the 15-year-old institution founded by Mary Lycan, the only director the chorus had ever had.

Silly me.

In order to sit among them and sing the music, I had to audition for Friedman, which proved a good introduction to his easy and easing style.

Of course the women welcomed him — they had put him through his own audition and chosen him over others last summer.

Still, my question remained: would they respond to him as he led them through the difficult phrases of the challenging music he chose — a repertoire selected because he knew it would help them produce the sounds required to rise above the acoustical challenges of Duke Chapel, where they will perform their first concert under his direction?

The answer was resounding — after the first rehearsal they were thrilled; three months later when I returned to hear how things had developed, it sounded as though the Chapel Hill Kehillah had been filled with angels as I walked through the door midway through their practice.

Relaxed and assured describe the scene a month away from the winter concert, titled "Herself a Rose," to be presented at 3 p.m. Jan. 13. Friedman will be directing on turf with which he is familiar, as assistant conductor/administrative coordinator of Duke Chapel Music — his day job.

He has found WVC conducting extremely enjoyable.

“I look forward to each Monday night both for the musical satisfaction it provides but also because it is a privilege to spend time with such a diverse and energized group of women,” Friedman wrote in an email.

Diverse indeed; the women span the age continuum from college student to retiree (the eldest in her 80s); and they come from all walks of life and all areas of the Triangle.

Cindy Clark, 45, lives in North Raleigh and is CEO of a biotech company in RTP. This is her third year in the chorus.

“I love Allan,” she said after rehearsal. “He is doing a good job of taking us where we’ve never been before.” One of those places is Duke Chapel (they’ve only sung during Thanksgiving services there, never a concert), and the other is a new level of musicianship. “He’s pushed people beyond where they’ve been but where they still feel comfortable.”

Friedman, 31, obviously feels comfortable as well. To ensure that each woman knew their part on the difficult pieces, he had them sing in octets, with two voices singing each of four parts, standing in front of the rest of the chorus. The formation was mixed so nobody stood next to someone singing the same part.

During one octet, where he sang first soprano, he said, “Ready guys — I mean girls?” They were all nervous and he relieved the pressure with, “Part of this is everyone gets to make a fool of themselves.” Singing his part in falsetto, he seemed very Adam Sandler-like, in appearance and expression, his head tilting horizontally while he sang and listened.

“I’ve been gratified by their commitment and enthusiasm, but it hasn’t surprised me,” he said. “It was clear from the moment I was hired that everyone in the group, from the president and long-time chorus veterans to the newest member cherished the group and the social bonds forged from singing together.”

Love for their founder continues to flow as well. The title song, composed by Eleanor Daley was commissioned in honor of Lycan, and their rich tones will surely warm the stone of the majestic chapel.

Deborah Coclanis, who accompanies the chorus on piano during rehearsals and concerts, said, “The members of Women’s Voices, myself included, are thankful that [Mary] gave us such a wonderful outlet for making music together and for introducing the community to music they may never have heard before.”

Tickets are \$10 (\$5 students) and available at the door or at www.womensvoiceschorus.org.

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
A Thousand Words  by Jock Lauterer



Illustration  by Phil Blank

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