

A Letter from our Founder

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Dear Members and Friends of the Chorus,

The themes for our most recent concerts (this one included) started with an Internet search—what doesn't these days? Last June's songs were inspired by the summer of Woodstock and Stonewall (1969) and included John Lennon's "Imagine". "Imagine," we sang, "...nothing to kill or die for." Then, searching for an idea for this concert, I thought: What happened a hundred years ago that we could celebrate? Another Internet search led to the Treaty of Versailles, the formal end to World War I. At that time, its signers hoped it would be "the war to end all wars." We know how that worked out.

So we've taken Lennon's song as the title for this concert. To commemorate the Treaty of Versailles, we'll sing music of the nations who fought in the war—music both ancient (a 15th-century French tune warning to beware "The Armed Man"), and modern (songs from the Broadway musical *Les Misérables*). But our concert isn't so much a celebration of war as an homage to the brave warriors who have fought them, and those who have died—soldiers and civilians alike.

The other hundred year anniversary that showed up in that search was the culmination of the suffrage movement in 1919 with Congress granting women the legal right to vote. But the states had to ratify it, and that happened in 1920. Hence, our June 2020 concert will honor the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, and the contribution of women to music.

The year 1919 has always been significant to me for a more personal reason. My father was born that August and would have been 100 this past summer. During the Vietnam and Watergate eras, like many American fathers and sons, we waged our own kind of intra-family war, battling about nearly everything, from hair to politics. But with Dad being gone these last 30 years, none of that seems to matter anymore; what counts is our love and family bond. I've learned that with the blood relations I have left I'd rather not discuss politics, but simply celebrate our family.

Isn't that really the way with the family of humankind too? Where's the beef we had with England two centuries ago? Where's the fear of Germany and Japan three generations removed from World War II? And fifty years after the Vietnam War, what's happened to our enmity for those people? Today, there's a steady stream of American tourists to all of these countries.

Maybe warfare is an inevitable part of the human experience, and perhaps we'll never fully see the end of conflicts. But John Lennon imagined it could be so, and this Holiday Season, so do we.

Jack Eppler

Founder and Director



Words and Music—A Global Adventure

“A chorus is safe when silent, but that’s not why it’s a chorus. It is my hope that together we find adventure and are open to unexpected turns,” Michele Ivey (below) told *Chorus Notes* when asked why a chorus like ours might tackle repertoire incorporating other languages. Ivey, whose anthem in honor of the 2010 victims of the earthquake in Haiti, “O Ayiti” (lower right), the chorus premiered in



2014, is guest soloist this season for *Imagine: An End to War*, honoring the centennial of the Treaty of Versailles.

With Ivey, the chorus will reprise the anthem, in Haitian creole, and will sing a repertoire incorporating languages of the many signers of the Treaty that ended World War 1—Russian, French and German among them. Last winter, the program included songs in West African and Yiddish. Over the years, New York City Community Chorus has entertained its audience in languages ranging from Hebrew and Arabic, to Italian, Spanish and French and even chants in traditional Lakota.

What an adventure! And of course, a way to enter more fully into an understanding of another culture, which is one of the reasons Chorus Director Jack Eppler elects to interpret the chorus’ mission of inclusion broadly—to the world—particularly when selecting music each season. That’s not always easy.

“Vowel sounds and even some consonant sounds can be very specific to different languages and very hard for a non-native speaker to reproduce,” he says, noting that Romance languages tend to have “pure” vowel sounds, like the “E” in Pedro as compared to ever-present diphthongs, a combination of vowels that slide into one another, here. (The “a” in “made” is really a combination of an “eh” and an “ee” in the U.S.) “CH” in German (“ich” or “ach”) can be difficult because the sounds are made in different parts of the vocal tract than everyday English speakers use, Eppler explained.

Somehow it all manages to come together for the performance. As Ivey told *Notes*, “Music transcends language as we know it...I hear in NYCCC a devoted chorus which sings with an open heart. I wish for them to listen to advice, study well, then sing, as they do, from their heart, remembering that inspiration lives in unexpected places.”

SPOTLIGHT: Jerry Kaplan, Proud Member since 1999!

Each season, our chorus welcomes new members. Some sing with us for a concert or two, while others remain much (much!) longer. Then, there's Jerry Kaplan, who's celebrating 20 years with the NYCCC...more than any other chorister.

Jerry's earliest encounter with singing was less-than-stellar. "I was told, early on in high school, that I should sing very quietly, as I had a 'new voice'," he says. So it's hardly surprising that he became self-conscious about his vocal abilities. "My assumption was that I should not sing."

In Junior High, Jerry had begun a three-year stint as clarinetist in the school orchestra, and he says he'll never forget his pride when the audience applauded (never mind that the audience was made up mostly of parents and they'd clapped while the band was tuning up). By senior year, he decided it was time to sing again, so he joined the chorus, albeit mostly to meet girls.



Fast-forward to 1999 when Jerry's wife Jeanie, a professional singer and frequent Chorus guest artist, told him, "You married a singer and now, you need to sing!" Way back then, the chorus had only 35 members (it's since grown to 96), with just four or five tenors. Jerry's never regretted his tenure as a tenor.

"It's been a wonderful experience," he says. "I'm sometimes amazed at how much I've learned—Jack is very patient with such a diverse mix of people, many of whom can't read music. But somehow, we all come together and manage to do a good job."

His fondest memories include the time he and Jeanie closed out the spring 2018 concert doing "the Lindy" as the chorus belted, "Rock Around the Clock," plus his one and only very short solo, which he considers a real "gee whiz" moment.

"My time singing with NYCCC has led to multiple friendships and the sense that I, too, can sing," he says. "It's a welcoming place for everyone, and I look forward to many more years with this wonderful group."

Bringing Down the House with *A Summer To Love*

There was dancing in the aisles—and girls with flowers in their hair. Psychedelic tie-dye lit up the stage. And then, there was the music.



A Summer to Love, NYCCC's tribute this spring to the 50th anniversaries of the Woodstock music festival and the Stonewall riots, was one big sing-along. (Even the non-sing-along selections!) Drawing more than 300 people, many who had actually trudged through the mud at Woodstock in 1969 and some who'd been on the scene at Stonewall, the concert featured some pretty extraordinary talent.

Surprise guest Marjorie Lipari, one of the original cast members of the Broadway production of *Hair* (pictured top left, in green), enchanted the audience with "Frank Mills" from that musical, which jazz writer and music producer Nat Shapiro described in his liner notes on the original cast album as a "teeny-bopper's plaint. It doesn't rhyme at all. It is really the great American novel."

"Singing with the choir was a joyful celebration of spirit and I felt beyond appreciated," Lipari said. "It was humbling—and rather divine—to participate. The vibe in the room was pure love and collective harmony."

Bob Dee's Cosmosis provided backup for the program. Dee soloed with a burning rendition of Jimi Hendrix's "Fire" from his Woodstock performance. Hendrix, whose three-hour set closed the Woodstock festival, was also reprised in stellar form by the chorus's very own Neil Matharoo, normally a quietly unassuming tenor, who set the concert tone early in the program with the iconic "Star Spangled Banner." A pin could have been heard dropping.

Matharoo (pictured, top left, page 5, guitar in hand) tells *Notes* that he's been a musician for most of his life, and in fact played the "Star Spangled Banner" for the first time at a high school assembly. "I moved to Brooklyn 13 years ago to pursue my interests as a musician," he said, adding that while it's not a full-fledged career yet, he has a couple of important projects underway, including one called Soundstatues and a band called The Halt.

Bringing Down the House (cont'd.)



How did it feel to be heralding such an important anniversary with his performance? "I'm a first-generation American, Chicago-born to parents who immigrated from India. So, the national anthem means a lot to me. And New York City means a lot to me too...it is one of America's greatest achievements," he responded. "It was a very humbling and powerful feeling to be playing the national anthem in New York City, with our incredible chorus. I like to think my ancestors would've been delightfully shocked to see how far one of their descendants has gone!"

Our audience is always a key player in every concert, and *Summer to Love* was no exception. Nostalgia reigned—for some, in a most personal way.

Jessie Ostrow, husband of chorus alto Linda Ostrow, who was at Woodstock had this to say: "Bravo to the New York City Community

Chorus...As one who attended Woodstock and as a lifetime New Yorker, it was wonderful to see and hear that music, which I remember so well, performed so beautifully and with such excitement and enthusiasm by the Chorus. It reminded me of the excitement and enthusiasm...also present in Woodstock. The big difference in experiences is that I was (thankfully) dry and warm at the Chorus performance...as opposed to freezing, wet and dripping with mud at Woodstock! It was also a joy to experience my wife's first performance with the Chorus. She clearly was in the moment and loving it...just like I was at Woodstock."

Maryellen Kluxen, friend of longtime chorus alto Kay Osborn reflected on the naivete of the 1969 concertgoers. "I had just graduated high school and my friend and I bought tickets...We packed our tent and went off to what we thought would be a fun time with some good music. Little did we know we would be part of an amazing event...a musical peace-loving community of many thousands." The concert brought Maryellen right back to that magical time and "for two hours, I was a young hippie again, experiencing what it could be like to live in true harmony with each other. Many thanks to the chorus for bringing me back there!"

For alto Peppy Dubno, the concert was kind of a full circle event. In 1969, "I was driving back from a vacation in Canada with my then-boyfriend and we planned to stop and see how it was. We had no tickets—but it didn't matter—there were no gates," she said. The pair parked miles away and walked with many others to the performance fields. While Vietnam was major news, Dubno recalls it being a time where young people believed anything was possible. "We were all there for a weekend of peace and love and music and despite all the things that went wrong, the music was there and kept going. It is an indelible memory." The full circle? "My then-boyfriend, still a very good friend, was at our concert with his wife. And while fifty years is a lifetime, I feel we are still innocent and hopeful."

Music truly is magical. Peace.



Twenty-five years ago this month...

*a small group, perhaps a dozen, of carolers set out through Manhattan's Chelsea to serenade passers-by, store owners and local residents. Snow was in the air that evening, and the intrepid group, meandering as far south as St. Vincent's Hospital on 12th Street, entertained the neighborhood with Christmas carols, Chanukah and holiday songs for a few hours. Those carolers were the first members of what is today the New York City Community Chorus. Originally called Holy Apostles Community Chorus, it was an outgrowth of the Church's outreach program and included a number of congregation members as well as residents from the neighboring Penn South apartment complex. The chorus' first actual concert was in the spring of 1995. This coming spring, on June 14, we'll celebrate our official **25th anniversary**. Come join us for the celebration and see how we've grown!*

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