

MoreCulture!

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Marin Symphony Youth Chorus- Singing As One Voice



Woooooo Woooooo! The sound fills the church, like a roller coaster. Seventeen pairs of arms shoot up, and then reach back, stretching, stretching. More movement, and sound- trills, notes gliding up and down the scales- and then at the end one sung word, ethereal and glorious- Alle-le-luia!

Jenny Bent is smiling at the group of youths assembled on the altar of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Novato. They have just finished

their vocal warm-ups, and all eyes are on Jenny, waiting for the cue to begin singing to the nearly empty church. Her arms raise up, and the late 1400's Renaissance choral composition "El Grillo (The Cricket)", spills forth filling the space with sound.

A cricket never sounded so good.



We are watching the rehearsal of the recently-formed Marin Symphony Youth Chorus (MSYC)- who've just wrapped up their first official season with the Marin Symphony- and we're also chatting with Jenny, their musical director. We ask her how the idea for the MSYC took hold-

"I was previously directing the Chantons [part of the Marin Children's Chorus] and was working on projects with Noralee [Noralee Monastere is Executive Director of the Marin Symphony] and it seemed like the right way to go...to create the Youth Chorus. We already had a wonderful Youth Symphony, so it was the natural next step."

They held auditions, and numerous teens- mostly from Marin- showed up. She recounts the criteria that led them to take the 22 that eventually formed the chorus, and to cut the rest-

"We looked at certain levels of ability, certainly. Specifically I looked for tone quality, their vocal technique, their musicianship skills and also their potential. And their ability to sight read, that is, to read music."



Many of the singers were already taking voice lessons and a few were referred by private studios. One curly-haired 8th grader, who has sung with the San Francisco Boys Choir (due to privacy issues, no names are being used) tells us he's "been singing since the third grade." We notice there are far more girls in the chorus, than boys. Jenny admits this is a huge challenge-

"You want a well balanced chorus, with both high and low voices. We don't get as many males and it's difficult to keep the balance."





The next musical piece illustrates the need for balance, as they begin to sing the lovely "Locus Iste" by Bruckner. It is



a profound work that seems to showcase the interplay between the higher soprano notes, and the lower male voices. The notes alternately soar and soften, creating a weave of sound that makes you want to hold your breath for fear of missing a note. She encourages them to "hold the notes... lengthen the sound...keep your mouths round" and then encourages them to "move the notes forward." Jenny tells us a bit about their first season-

"We had approximately ten performances, including the school tour we just had today. They sang at the Candlelight Concerts (a holiday event), and also for Carmina Burana. They also had a couple of performances with the Festival Singers ensemble."



When the season is underway, they rehearse once a week with Jenny, and then with the Marin Symphony. Many of the young singers still perform with their church choirs and other groups, so it's clear they are passionate about music. A dark-haired, Terra Linda HS senior tells us she has been singing since Kindergarten and intends to "at least minor in music" in college. She has known Jenny for several years, and is clearly a fan-



"She's incomparable, her expertise and knowledge...she gets us to sound our best- work on our technique- work as a team. The goal is to sing as one voice."

While the singers are appreciative of Jenny, she is equally devoted to them. She says she'd rather work with passionate high schoolers- who can be notoriously difficult- rather than with a pro with no passion. We notice that while the Chorus kids joke and talk amongst themselves as teens do, all eyes are on Jenny when it's time to perform.

The youngest chorus member, practically bubbles with enthusiasm. She enjoys singing- especially show tunes and Broadway numbers- but is just as crazy about acting. And dance. In fact, her dream is to make it to the bright lights of Broadway. But for now, she's looking forward to her freshman year at San Rafael High.

Another high school senior, off to college next fall, plans on double majoring music with biochemistry

or molecular biology. The soft-spoken young man, who is about to graduate from Marin School of the Arts in Novato, also plays piano and flute. There are few slackers in this bunch.



Jenny is deciding between two pieces of music to end the rehearsal, but the Chorus is clamoring to sing "Bring A Torch, Jeanette, Isabella", from their Candlelight Concert way back in December. Jenny seems tentative about the selection and turns to face us. "It's been five months since they sang it!" she says, not sure how they will sound, but she turns back around, arm raised. Their piano player, Barbara Bacon, taps out the familiar chords and the group begins to sing the familiar carol.

No worries, Jenny. They sing as one voice.

Details-

Auditions for the 2008/2009 season will be held in June and August. For details go [here](#).



Marin Symphony Youth Chorus [website](#)

Jenny Bent hosts [The Choir Loft](#), on KRCB radio, every third Sunday at 10am.

MoreMarin plans to include a MSYC audio sample here soon. Please check back!



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