

Headwaters Concert Choir to sing at Carnegie Hall

By Constance Scrafield

The rewards of travelling regularly to a central point to rehearse, to sing with all one's concentration, getting the notes, the rhythm, harmonies, entrances all right and remembered are not only a great joy to those who participate in community choirs; those efforts can sometimes also be rewarded by unthinkable opportunities.

So it is and has been for the Headwaters Concert Choir, joining forces with several other such groups to form the Great Lakes Touring Chorus, the emphasis on which is 'touring'.

The Chorus has won acclaim for its performances and interpretations of Handel's Messiah, Carl Orff's 'Carmina Burana' and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, to mention but a few.

In addition, the founder and conductor of GLTC, Robert Hennig, a graduate of the University of Toronto, has himself won the Toronto Kopaz Foundation award and the Canadian Opera's Women's Society award for musical excellence, along with the Brampton Arts Council Bloom award for best new composition for his Alleluia for Peace. Hennig is also the director for the Brampton Festival Singers and the Headwaters Concert Choir.

His wife, Shelagh Tyreman, co-founder and assistant co-director of the Great Lakes Touring Chorus, has degrees from University of Toronto and Mount Royal University as well as studies from other prestigious arts institutions.

As a result of being invited to perform at the Haydn Choral Music Festival in 2009, the GLTC went to Austria and the Czech Republic. For anyone who understands music and acoustics, it was the trip of a lifetime. They had the chance to sing in the acoustically perfect Haydn Hall within the Esterhazy Palace in Vienna and the fabulous Melk Abbey.

During that 2009 tour, they went on to Prague in the Czech Republic to sing with the Prague chorus, Inventus.

It was during that tour that they were invited to go to France in March 2010 to participate in the 65th Anniversary of the Liberation of France by the Allies, in the course of which tour they also sang in the great Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris.

As it happened, that trip yielded yet another invitation which saw them performing at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome in March 2012.

We had the chance to talk about those adventures and the next thrilling trip for the GLTC with Nancy Claridge, a member of the Headwaters Concert Choir and the GLTC.

'They were amazing trips,' she commented. 'We went places other travellers wouldn't be able to go. Imagine singing in the Esterhazy Palace or the Vatican.'

The next excitement for the GLTC is a trip to New York City today (Thursday) to represent Canada in a massed choir that will perform next Monday at Carnegie Hall. While they were in Rome, Hennig met some people from New York who encouraged them to enter a contest with Distinguished Concerts International New York (DCINY) by sending a recording. This resulted in an invitation to sing in a concert at the famous Carnegie Hall.

Organized by DCINY to honour music publisher Shawnee Press on its 75th anniversary, the original plan was for the GLTC to go to New York in mid-March to perform Mozart's Requiem, which they had already sung.

As it turned out, the Vienna Philharmonic wanted the mid-March dates. There was then the suggestion to move the DCINY concert to the Lincoln Centre, another famed venue. However, the choirs wanted the once-in-a-lifetime chance to sing at Carnegie Hall, so not only the dates were changed but so was the repertoire.

This has meant that GLTC members have had to work hard to learn the new music, some 11 pieces, which they will be performing with other groups. They will be singing with a full symphony orchestra, which is a different experience from being accompanied by a other smaller orchestra or piano.

'The music is about the same level as the Mozart,' Hennig, told us in a telephone interview, 'and this was all new material for us.'

The group is also scheduled for 15 hours of rehearsals and workshops before the Feb. 17 concert.

The music to be performed by the collection of choirs has all been published by Shawnee Press. In addition, the composers and arrangers of the music will be at the rehearsals and giving the workshops 'a rare opportunity for the singers to work with the composers.

Furthermore, GLTC is singing a completely different repertoire at the Episcopal cathedral church of St. John the Divine Friday. This performance invitation, which the chorus is singing on its own, came as a result of the trip to Rome, too.

The GLTC has choristers from the broader area of Dufferin, Caledon, Brampton, Toronto and Mississauga, all coming together under Hennig's directorship. They have been rehearsing at St. Joseph's Anglican Church in Bramalea, where Hennig is organist/choirmaster and have been preparing for this performance since late last spring.

Said Hennig, rather reflectively, 'This is like a dream come true 'like a lifetime achievement, to take a group to New York. I think a

lot of the choir don't understand what they're about to do but it will hit them when they get there.

?In Europe too, you're dealing with a society that is so well educated. They've heard the music performed by other groups,? he added. ?They know what to listen for.?

Of the talent in the GLTC, he commented: ?Early retirees are volunteering ? they want to be involved in the arts. We've been able to attract people with high music skills, some are pretty well accomplished. People like Orangeville and come there to retire. It's quite a pocket of talent. A lot of them were with the Mendelssohn Choir.?