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INGRID GAY
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Choral Connections' socially distanced Christmas show in December 2021 — at the Terry Fox Theatre in Port Coquitlam — under the vocal direction of Ingrid Gay, the group's artistic director and a music teacher at Heritage Wood Secondary School in Port Moody. The organization is now recruiting members — especially male vocalists. **PHOTOS SUBMITTED**

MUSIC

Singing four-part harmony: In-person and online

Standing before about 30 singers at Port Coquitlam's Trinity United Church — plus another 21 members online for the weekly rehearsal — Ingrid Gay starts the vocal warm-ups for Choral Connections.

She asks the singers to rise from their seats as the exercises require the whole body, not just the cords and lungs. First come the lip trills. Then the sounds for the articulators: *Zing, zinga, za-za-za-za* and *ma-ma-ma*.

After a few minutes, Gay asks the choir to pull their sheet music out for Schubert's *Ave Maria*. The sopranos and altos are in unison first, then the tenors

and basses. "There are a lot of long lines here," she says. "We don't want to take a communal breath. Make sure they're staggered."

The music teacher at Heritage Woods Secondary in Port Moody, Gay instructs the singers to focus in on Bar 25, breaking down the harmonies and concentrating on the vocal vowel shapes.

"Keep it bright. Don't let them fall back," she encourages during the 20-minute practise of the song.

Gay, who follows with Elvis Presley's version of *C'mon On Everybody*, as well as *Jordan's Angels* and *Defying Gravity*, offers some stories as she leads the adult

choir through the pieces.

Gay won the job as the artistic director of Choral Connections in 2014 — a year after the choir began, with Vincent Lo accompanying on piano. And she's also responsible for picking the tunes for the season, says president Terry Bates, a founding board member.

To mix up the repertoire, Gay presents a variety of genres, Bates says, from folk and Canadiana to sacred and Broadway. "We have also done jazz and rock but, so far, no rap, but you never know," Bates says.

COVID PIVOT

Like most organizations,

Choral Connections had to pivot in the spring of 2020 to adjust to the provincial health protocols.

A rotating schedule was quickly organized to have up to 35 singers — masked and fully vaccinated — in the church at one time, while a virtual outreach was also set up for members to attend live rehearsals; two singers regularly beam in from Kelowna, Bates says.

"We have a 15-minute period before the rehearsal where choir members can socialize on Zoom but when the rehearsal starts, everyone is muted except Ingrid, of course," Bates says. "Unfortunately, technology

cannot compensate for different lag times on the internet so listening to the virtual singers is not feasible."

Currently, rehearsals run for one hour and 15 minutes, with no breaks, on Tuesdays; however, Bates says when "things get back to normal," practices will return to two hours; regular concerts and performances at seniors homes will also be back.

And with health restrictions poised to ease this year, he says Choral Connections is eager to recruit new singers — especially male voices.

There is no audition required to join. "Our singers come from a variety of backgrounds," Bates says.

"Some have been singing for many years and have been on stage outside of choir. Some have not been onstage other than with this group. Some can read music, some can't... We welcome anyone who wants to sing."

Bates says there are not only musical benefits to being part of a choir but social togetherness, too.

"You get to sing great repertoire that you can't sing by yourself," he says. "You meet new people with a common interest. And it gives a sense of joy, as singing releases endorphins that reduce stress and anxiety."

Email info@choralconnections.ca to join the choir.

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