

A CHORAL

by Andrew Alexander



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MICHAEL PARKER

"Performing in the concert is just a gift"
CYN DEBOLD

"... it lifts your spirits..."
LINDA MORGAN

LIFE

"I love music,
I love performing"
**EDGIE
WALLACE**



WANTED: Dedicated workers at the top of their field to devote themselves to a demanding, high-pressure job as part of a disciplined team. Must work evenings with long hours of rigorous preparation. Perfect diction in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Latin and several other languages a prerequisite. Successful applicants will be able to meet the highest expectations for relentlessly flawless, world-class performance. Payment: None.

It sounds utterly insane, and a job posting like that would be unlikely to get many responses. But a spot in the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus, which has always operated on an entirely volunteer basis, remains one of the most coveted positions for singers in the city, and well beyond. Dedicated singers make the weekly drive from Augusta, Chatsworth, Griffin, LaGrange, and in some cases, from Alabama and South Carolina. Once accepted into the chorus, many members remain for years, if not decades.

Being a chorus member requires hard work, time and dedication, all without compensation. So what keeps so many choristers motivated and coming back season after season, balancing demanding schedules with full-time jobs and personal responsibilities?

Chorus members give many answers, but primary among them is a love of the music. Many members are professional musicians who volunteer their time to be part of the renowned ASO Chorus. And as legendary Atlanta Symphony Music Director Robert Shaw, who founded the ASO Chorus in 1970, would remind "non-professional" members, the word "amateur" applies only in the best

and truest sense of the word. Simply put, they do what they do because they love it.

"I just love the music making and being around all these people that love music," says Arietha Lockhart, a soprano who joined the chorus in 1983 under Shaw. "It doesn't matter whether we get paid or not. We love what we do. We are serious music-makers, and if the music requires us to do things a certain way or it takes a long time to learn, we do it."

The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus meets regularly for rehearsals on Monday evenings and every night the week leading up to a choral concert. It takes anywhere from six to twelve weeks to learn a new piece. It's a slow, painstaking process that begins with practicing the notes bit by bit, slowly adding in dynamics, color and finally the text before rehearsing with the orchestra early in the concert week.

"I love music, I love performing," says Edgie Wallace, a flight attendant who has sung baritone with the ASO Chorus for 21 seasons. "It's just been a joy. I build my life around chorus and save my vacation time for rehearsal week."

In any given season, members of the ASO Chorus volunteer 78 evenings, or 234 hours of rehearsal and performance time. ASO Chorus members who are also members of the ASO Chamber Chorus devote 89 evenings, or approximately 287 hours. Balancing the demands of chorus with the demands of daily life isn't always easy, members say, but the rewards of creating music together make it all worthwhile.

"After a busy day, you think 'I have to drive downtown and go to Symphony Chorus,'

said Linda Morgan, who has sung first alto since 1972. "Then once you get there, and you start singing, it lifts your spirits. It's the whole experience of starting on a piece, woodshedding it and really getting into the meat of it. There's a commonality. We come from varying backgrounds, and we're all there for this single purpose."

Many chorus members say they value the friendships they've made in the chorus over the years, but they're also quick to point out that a chorus rehearsal is anything but a social occasion. There's time for light socializing during breaks, but rehearsals themselves are serious business. "We start on time at 7:30," says Andrew Gee, a pastoral counselor who has sung second bass in the chorus since 1993. "It's all business for the whole rehearsal. By the time we're finished, everybody is ready to go home."

In the end, singing in the chorus is about the opportunity to create music as part of a community, Gee says. "For me it's a musical experience, it's a spiritual experience, it's a cultural experience, it's a communal experience with the chorus members, the audience and the city," he says. "People know that they're doing something greater than themselves."

"We're in there working hard to put the music together, but when you have the opportunity to really make music it makes everything you've worked on for the past month and a half so worth it," says Cyn DeBold, who works as a case manager for Farmers Insurance when she's not singing second alto for the ASO Chorus, which she's done since 1983.



“Performing in the concert is just a gift. It’s so much fun.”

Baritone David Hansen, who has sung with the chorus for over three decades, even as he’s met the busy demands of working in federal housing for the elderly, handicapped and disabled and also acting as director of choral music at Redeemer Lutheran Church, points out that for many dedicated chorus members, participation is often more like a compulsion than a choice. “We are the only outfit that works at this level,” he says. “For someone who is a chorus musician, you simply have to do it. People don’t get into music because they have a choice. This is not a hobby, it is not a softball team. You do it because you have to. You do give up a lot to do it. There’s a profound sense of duty that goes along with it.”

A commitment to perpetuating the legacy of Robert Shaw is a strong motivating factor for many longtime chorus members. Shaw is legendary for having developed choral teaching techniques and performance standards that are now world-renowned. His commitment and artistry are perpetuated in the chorus through the singers and also through the leadership of current Director of Chorus Norman Mackenzie, who acted as principal accompanist and assistant choral conductor under Shaw.

“The term that always comes to mind is ‘well-oiled machine,’” says Nick Jones, who has sung with the chorus since 1970 when it was formed, first as a tenor before moving into the baritone section. “It’s bigger than the sum of its parts. When we come together and work together to make this music, and suddenly, we’re all doing the same thing at the same time, there’s a unanimity of purpose, of action, of effect that is just mind-

blowing.”

“I owe my existence to this chorus,” says soprano Meg Granum, a claim she can make without exaggeration. Her parents were both in the chorus in the 1980s and first got to know each other carpooling to Atlanta from their homes in Athens. “They started dating, fell in love, got married. And here I am.” Granum is now in her fourth season with the ASO Chorus and says she finds the same sense of joy and satisfaction that her mom, a soprano, and her dad, a baritone, since retired, once did. “It’s the precision of the music,” she says. “It’s about working really hard and loving every minute of the process. It’s that feeling when we get on stage when we finally put everything together with the orchestra, the thrill of everything lining up and the finesse that comes from a group this polished.”

Tenor Michael Parker, a native Atlantan who has sung with the chorus for six seasons, says he grew up idolizing the ASO Chorus and Robert Shaw. Singing with the chorus now fulfills a lifelong dream. “All of my choral directors were Shaw devotees, and I learned all of the techniques,” he says. “It was something to look up to and aspire to. I really always wanted to be part of the chorus. There are still moments when I feel like a groupie. I feel like this fan that gets to play with the band.”

“The emotional capacity that this chorus produces with the discipline they put into their singing, the unity of that sound, quite simply can’t be found in any other ensemble I’m aware of anywhere in the world.”



Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus

Norman Mackenzie,

DIRECTOR OF CHORUSES

The Frannie and Bill Graves Chair

Jeffrey Baxter,

CHORAL ADMINISTRATOR

The Florence Kopleff Chair

Peter Marshall,

ACCOMPANIST

SOPRANO 1

Ellen Abney
Kathryn Bishop
Hanan Davis
Khadijah Davis
Sakinah Davis
Amy Dowis
Virginia Elizondo
Laura Foster
Meg Granum
Michelle Griffin
Jayme Hogan-Yarbro
Jacquelyn Holloway
Erin Jones
Arietha Lockhart **
Mindy Margolis *
Joneen Padgett *
Lisa Rader *
Brianna Riley
Natalie Rogers
Stacey Tanner
Brianna Turgeon *
Wanda Yang Temko *

SOPRANO 2

June Abbott **
Sloan Atwood *
Jessica Barber
Anne Beloncik Schantz
Jasmine Blue
Barbara Brown
Kelly Campobasso
Martha Craft
Ellen Dukes **
Kimberly Duncan
Mary Goodwin
Amanda Hoffman
Kathleen Kelly-George
Eda Mathews **
Shannon Nesbit
Vickie Orme
Lindsay Patten
Chelsea Rhoades
Donna Ross *
Paula Snelling *
Tommie Storer

Emily Tallant
Cheryl Thrash
Brenda Turner
Donna Weeks *
Katie Woolf

ALTO 1

Erin Axson
Shana Bassett
Deborah Boland **
Rachel Bowman
Donna Carter-Wood *
Laurie Cronin
Beth Freeman
Noelle Hooge
Beverly Hueter
Janet Johnson **
Lauren Johnson
Virginia Little *
Staria Lovelady
Frances McDowell **
Mary Elizabeth
Mendenhall
Linda Morgan **
Kathleen Poe Ross
Laura Soltis
Meesook Sonu
Diana Strommen
Grace Thompson
Nancy York *

ALTO 2

Nancy Adams *
Marcia Chandler
Meaghan Curry
Cynthia Goeltz
DeBolt **
Michèle Diamant
Sally Kann
Nicole Khoury *
Katherine MacKenzie
Lynda Martin
Campbell Rogers
Andrea Schmidt
Sharon Simons
Alexandra Tanico

Virginia Thompson *
Sarah Ward
Alexandra Willingham
Kiki Wilson **
Diane Woodard **

TENOR 1

Jeffrey Baxter **
Jordan Bell
Christian Bigiani
David Blalock **
John Brandt *
Jack Caldwell *
Daniel Cameron *
Jared Campbell
Justin Cornelius
Joseph Cortes
Ryan Dikdan
Clifford Edge **
Steven Farrow **
Leif Gilbert-Hansen *
James Jarrell
Keith Langston
Clinton Miller
Christopher Patton
Stephen Reed #
Mark Warden *

TENOR 2

Randall Barker**
Mark Barnes
Curtis Bisges
Charles Cottingham #
Phillip Crumbly *
Joseph Few *
Hamilton Fong
Keith Jeffords **
Steven Johnstone *
Jonathan Marvel
Michael Parker
Marshall Peterson *
Clifton Russell
Wesley Shearer
Thomas Slusher
Scott Stephens *
Robert Wilkinson

BASS 1

Dock Anderson
Richard Brock *
Russell Cason **
Trey Clegg
Michael Cranford
Steven Darst **
Michael Dennison
Jon Gunnemann *
David Hansen **
Nick Jones #
Jameson Linville
Peter MacKenzie
Jason Maynard
Mark Mendenhall
Andrew Riechel
Kendric Smith #
John Terry
Ike Van Meter
Edgie Wallace *
Edward Watkins **

BASS 2

Joshua Alexander
Philip Barreca
Charles Boone
Brian Brown *
Joseph Champion
Joel Craft **
Paul Fletcher
Andrew Gee *
Eric Litsey **
Evan Mauk
Eckhart Richter *
John Ruff *
Jonathan Smith
Timothy Solomon **
Ben Temko
David Webster **
Seth Whitecotton
Gregory Whitmire *
Keith Wyatt *

* 20+ years of service

** 30+ years of service

Charter member (1970)