

OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT VENUE: Collaborations in New Spaces

by Andrea Goodman

Ever think about this?

Every choral group struggles to keep audiences returning season after season. A number of friends and family members are guaranteed to attend, but there is a way for creative programming to attract an audience beyond this circle.

I direct the 24-voice Cantilena Chamber Choir in western Massachusetts, and we had to “think outside the box” to continue to expand our audience and survive. We found that collaborations with other local arts groups, not only music groups but also theater and dance companies as well as local museums are an effective way to share and build new audiences by exposing their patrons to choral music they otherwise might never hear. These events help share administrative resources, mailing lists, and most significantly build new and ever-lasting community ties with others in your area who struggle to enrich lives through the arts.

While we have performed with local professional chamber music ensembles, in our area we are also blessed with numerous professional theater companies. Many of these have actors who always draw large summer crowds, but in the less busy off-season months they crave the opportunity for more local performances. Together with these actors we have performed readings of plays with additional choral incidental music and have presented several “poets & writers” concerts (Frost, Shakespeare and Whitman, for example). These concerts attract new audiences who come not only for the music but also because they either admire the featured writer and/or come to see the actors they enjoy perform the readings between the selections. This fall, we present our Emily Dickinson concert with music by Barber, Carter, Parker and Larsen based on her poems.

PERFORM IN NON-TRADITIONAL HALLS

A recent article in the Chorus America Journal about performing choral music in non-traditional spaces outside the concert hall was extremely inspiring. What immediately came to mind were all the museums and historic homes in my area of western Massachusetts where we could perform a concert. One of our local museums recently opened an historic weapons exhibit. Why not perform Janequin’s *La Guerre* in that gallery?

In the adjoining gallery are 19th century American Master paintings that inspired choral works based on old American folksongs as well as the music of Chadwick and Beach. The European Masters gallery provides the easiest choices, and every other room in the museum suggested a myriad of possibilities. And why have the audience sit in one place? Why not move the choir from gallery to gallery and have the audience follow?



photo by David B.

**The Mount
Lenox, MA**

Last season we performed a concert at The Mount, Edith Wharton’s restored 1904 historic home in Lenox. I struggled to find music with Wharton texts, yet after a private tour of the home I realized I was headed in the wrong direction. One of the rooms contained an exhibit featuring Wharton’s involvement in the World War I Belgian War Relief. I discovered she had concerts in her Parisian salon to raise money for the relief effort with her friends Poulenc, D’Indy and Ravel in attendance. They not only played in these concerts but also had their own music performed.

Originally, these concerts featured mostly chamber music, but we resurrected the salon concert idea and performed the a cappella choral music of these composers right in the drawing room of this magnificent home. The concert repertoire was only part of the draw for the audience, which also had a chance to see the inside of this beautiful house included in the price of a concert ticket.



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We also performed this past summer in the round stone barn at Hancock Shaker Village in the Berkshires. Who would ever plan a concert in a barn? Thankfully, the mooing, braying, baaing and clucking animals were kept outside during the performance. The concert was a highlight of a gala 50th anniversary benefit for the museum so its administration handled the promotion for the event. The performance opened up a new area of repertoire we had never performed — Shaker Hymns and Songs. By the way, the acoustics were superb.



**Hancock Shaker Village Round Barn
Pittsfield, MA**
The only round barn ever built by the Shakers.

NON-ARTS NON-PROFITS NEED YOU TOO

Your local non-profit organization — educational, health and human services or any kind of community service organization — would jump at the chance to have your choir perform a benefit concert. If they can't pay your expenses, your local businesses now have a new reason to address your request for sponsorship.

In our seven years of concert production, the most we ever raised was a benefit for the Berkshire Immigrant Center that provides programs and services to new American arrivals. The idea was sparked by a New York City performance of Ron Perera's "The Golden Door" for chorus and chamber ensemble with texts based on the diaries of immigrants who came through Ellis Island. Several local business grants and community grants programs we had never successfully obtained were now jumping at the chance to sponsor a local performance of this work in concert because it helped the center — a very heartwarming experience indeed!

It is my hope that in sharing these ideas, your choir will begin to reach out and try a few new ideas for concerts in your own communities, both in and out of your normal venue. Your audiences will grow and you will expose an ever-increasing number of people to the very reason we are choral musicians — the love of fabulous choral music!

Andrea Goodman is the director of the Cantilena Chamber Choir and also serves as the Director of the Northern Berkshire Chorale based in Williamstown. She has been a visiting professor of conducting at the New England Conservatory of Music where she also directed the women's choir. During the summer season she serves as Director of the annual Saratoga Choral Festival, now in its eleventh season. She has prepared choirs for the Philadelphia Orchestra under Charles Dutoit, and has previously served as Director of the Concord Chorus (MA), Director of Choirs at Skidmore College and New York University. Her guest appearances have included the Aspen Music Festival in Colorado, the Festival de Musique Sacrée in Fribourg, Switzerland, and the Festival of White Nights in St. Petersburg, Russia. Goodman holds a DMA in Conducting from the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music.

FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO:

Cantilena Chamber Choir - <http://www.cantilenachoir.org>
Northern Berkshire Chorale - <http://bhsinging.info/cdata/noberk.html>
Saratoga Choral Festival - <http://www.saratogachoralfest.org>
Edith Wharton's home, The Mount - <http://www.edithwharton.org>
Hancock Shaker Village - <http://www.hancockshakervillage.org>