

# Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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## Voices of the suburbs blend in world class chorale



Director Frederick Bellinger leads Cantata Academy singers at a concert during the 1985-86 Silver Anniversary series in the Greater Detroit area. The chorale has established its place in the Michigan music scene with a combination of adventurous programming, sound musicianship and enthusiastic performance of a musical spectrum, which ranges from haute-classical to rollicking folk songs.

By Martha M. Lostron  
staff writer

There is laughter in the aisles... there is the soul stirring of the spiritual songs... the audience is uplifted by 40 talented voices. Cantata Academy, Detroit's world-class chorale, holds the power to entice the human spirit to move, to be free in the enjoyment of song.

This group of talented singers, all of whom spend many hours of their leisure practicing for concerts in Detroit and the surrounding suburbs, perform for the love of singing. Most hold full-time jobs in professions unrelated to their vocal talents and many of them are friends and neighbors of ours in the Detroit suburbs.

At 82, Otto Koch of Southfield is the oldest member. He recalls singing with the Metropolitan Opera 60 years ago. His voice is often heard solo in Cantata performances.

Lekann Wolf of Royal Oak has been with the Cantata for 15 years.

"We've gotten better, grown a little. There were seven of us that went to Europe the first time in 1973. Whole families went; we paid our own expenses."

Marjane Baker of Livonia, a five-year member, also enjoyed touring with the chorale in Europe. Ten years of voice training has been instrumental in making her part of the group.

"You need guts to audition," she quips. Cantata is a strong part of her life, rounding out her job of teaching music on the elementary level in Plymouth schools.

Hederick Reese of Detroit is section leader in bass. It's his second year in the chorale and he loves it.

"Fred (Bellinger) inspires from the inside," notes Reese. "We've been able to impress ourselves as well as the people who come to our performances. Fred does original interpretations that both surprise and delight audiences."

Frederick Bellinger, musical director of the group since 1971, is presently on the music faculty of Cranbrook schools and is choirmaster at Christ Episcopal Church in Detroit. His past experience as a singer, including an appearance as tenor soloist with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, adds an extra expertise as director.

At an afterglow party following the Christmas concert at the Great Hall in Cranbrook — packed to capacity — Fred Bellinger sat cross-legged on the floor, sampling sumptuous desserts and enjoying the camaraderie of the singers. He respects them all for their exceptional vocal talents and yet manages to make them feel good about being part of the group.

Around Fred there is nothing but praise for his inspiration to song and the challenge of exciting arrangements under his direction. This is definitely a

mutual admiration society that is delighted to have an audience that appreciates them.

A Sunday afternoon of Gilbert and Sullivan planned for April 27 at historic Trinity Lutheran Church in Detroit is yet another of Fred's inspired programs. It will have something for everyone: serious chorale music, lighter selections and a unique way to welcome spring. The ticket price will also include the refreshment of wine and cheese.

Business manager Janice Berry of Dearborn, a singer with the Cantata for 11 years, is excited about this last program in the 1985-86 subscription series. "Community interest is peaking," she noted.

"We underestimated what we could do and we're very pleased with the community response," she added, noting that the Christmas concert at Cranbrook was sold out and that the full house was overwhelmingly receptive to the musical program.

In addition to the three-part subscription series, the chorale takes on work offered to them throughout the Greater Detroit communities. They do one concert for the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Detroit every year to repay it for free use of the church for their weekly practices.

Although outside groups or organizations that hire the Cantata can suggest the type of program they'd like, it's up to Bellinger to put it together. December was an extremely busy month for the singers, who performed four Messiahs in the greater Detroit area.

Over the years the Cantata has performed on the deck of a boat, at Unity Temple in Chicago as part of fund-raising activity for the three-level Frank Lloyd Wright design, and with the Detroit Symphony six or seven times.

An inaugural concert in conjunction with last year's Freedom Festival in Detroit will have a repeat performance this June 29. The program will feature all American, Canadian and patriotic music, but you can be sure the interpretations by Bellinger will make it seem new and exciting.

By summertime, Cantata Academy

will be holding auditions for the coming season. Every singer has to audition every year. The group makes sure that audition notices are posted just about everywhere and accessible to every interested area vocalist.

Singing with the chorale for the remainder of the season will be sopranos Ellen Boyes of Birmingham, Millie Gardner of Troy, Irene Larson of Farmington Hills and Mary VanWyke of Farmington Hills; tenors include James Lewis of Farmington Hills and Russell Medale of Lathrup Village; alto voices will be Maraguerite Pries of Birmingham, Margaret Hawley of Bloomfield Hills, Carol Schock of Farmington Hills and Wendy Wagner of Livonia; Otto Koch and Daniel Kolton, both of Southfield, and Mel VanderBrug of Birmingham round out the bass division.

The remainder of the group encompasses not only Detroit, but Novi, Brighton and Monroe singers.

"It's amazing at the end of a long, arduous concert, singers are 'high'... it becomes an emotional experience to perform as a group," said Berry.

"All are trained singers. They can't do what they are doing without previous training and many are still studying."

"There is also a lot of individual participation in our efforts to offer more exciting programs at more places," she added. Future plans call for dance and light shows along with the choral work.

She claims it takes a good six weeks every fall to make a chorus out of the expert singers and it's for the rest of us to enjoy their many performances throughout the year.

"The creativity of the group is really coming out now. Quality is better and we also have better discipline as a group through our many practices."

"A group like this does not aspire to become a national group — it's an avocation. The main goal is to be a little gem in the community."

For more information on the Cantata Academy's upcoming performances, write J Dearborn Lane, Dearborn 48120 or call 271-5946.

## Actors try to overcome play's tasteless humor

By Gay Zieger  
special writer

Bad plays have a way of stratifying into nearly okay, pretty awful and yech. "It Had to Be You" by a fairly good actor, Joseph Bologna, and his actress-wife, Renee Taylor, is purely atrocious.

In being true to the spirit of the thing, Sally Dubats and B.J. Robert were sucked into a burlesque of low poses and nasty sentiments expressed crudely.

The play at Will-O-Way is short — an hour and a half with a 10-minute intermission. Until the last 20 minutes, the play is an absolute affront — a grim experience.



Gay Zieger

The absurd story line was augmented by serious overacting and general hysteria.

DUBATS RECOGNIZES her character as vaguely unstable and most certainly theatrical, but too often she appears afflicted with St. Vitus's Dance. It is interesting that when the sexual

language ebbs toward the end, so does her freneticism — and it is then that her capability shines through.

Robert plays a more subdued character, but also must wait for the concluding scene to emerge as a living, breathing persona. By the end, these two are quite lovable, but the road to the end seems mighty long.

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