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WE'RE THE CHORUS YOUR MOTHER WARNED YOU ABOUT!



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2002  
2003

**WORTH COMING OUT FOR!**

The Common Woman Chorus is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that has served the Triangle community since 1983. The Chorus is a proud member of The Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA), The Sister Singers Network, and TriangleSings! We are directed by the talented Cindy Bizzell. We rehearse on Tuesdays from 7 PM til 9 PM. Contact us at [commonwoman-chorus.org](http://commonwoman-chorus.org) to learn about the next open rehearsal.

Individual and corporate donations are greatly appreciated and vital to our continuing efforts. They enable us to rent rehearsal space, provide our director with a stipend, purchase music and, eventually, risers.

The Common Woman Chorus ... we're the chorus your mother warned you about!

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DURHAM NC 27717  
[COMMONWOMANCHORUS.ORG](http://COMMONWOMANCHORUS.ORG)

# WELCOME

THE CHORUS has planned a new and exciting season, and you're invited to the festivities. Our first major production, *Home for the Holidays ... Our Way*, premieres in November, when the Chorus's own Rosie O'Connelly hosts the holiday variety show you wish you could see on television. Join the Chorus, Rosie, and reunited classmates from The Gertrude Stein Academy for the Exceptionally Androgynous Child for a night of television gait. In February, the Chorus teams up with The Triangle Gay Men's Chorus and Rubyslipper Dance Asylum for *Love Love Love*, a fabulous twist on our annual Valentine's concert and dance. Keep those dancing shoes polished! Then, a milestone. In 2003, the Chorus celebrates 20 years of feminist musicmaking with *The Heroes Concert*. Please join us in celebrating women whose love, creativity, bravery, and strength inspire us all.



## from the podium

I AM HONORED to direct the Common Woman Chorus. We are a community of women who come together each week to give ourselves the gift of musicmaking. In our public performances, we share the gift of our music with you.

As director, my goal is to expand the group's musicianship so that each singer enjoys music more fully in her life. In turn, we share that expertise and enjoyment with you, our beloved audience. It is my hope that the presence of the Chorus in our community provides a constant affirmation of women's struggles, power, lives, and loves.

Our members are a blend of amateur and classically trained musicians. We welcome any woman who enjoys singing to join us. No auditions required. Instead, we work together to create a space that honors all women as we lift our voices in song.

Thank you for supporting us in our 2002-2003 performance season as we celebrate the journey of our lives.

*Cindy*



# 2002–2003 season

The Common Woman Chorus is a feminist organization committed to singing inclusive music that celebrates the diversity and strength of women's everyday lives and experiences. We perform at progressive events throughout the year and support our activities through concerts and other fund-raising activities. Our name is derived from a Judy Grahn poem that reads, in part, "a common woman is as common as a common loaf of bread ... and will rise."

The Chorus typically hosts two major concerts a year. Our repertoire includes translations ("Azanian Freedom Song"; the testimony of a Holocaust survivor), scores that showcase the integrity and inherent worth of individuals (a tribute to Harriet Tubman, a tribute to victims of the AIDS epidemic, elegies for victims of hate crimes and domestic violence, witness testimony from the Sacco and Vanzetti trial), accounts of historical abuse against women (an overview of the witchhunts), tunes to make our audience laugh ("I Got Those OBG Why Me Blues," "Big Dogs Music and Wild, Wild Women Are Making My Life Complete") while encouraging all of us to appreciate our differences ("I'm a Big-Legged Woman," "I'm a Gray-Haired Woman and I'm Coming into My Years," "Don't Shut My Sister Out") and personal struggles ("To Breed or Not to Breed"), plus plenty of politically charged works. Our original theatrical productions and unique twists on old standards—"I Want a Girl Just Like the Girl Who Married Dear Old Dad," for example—explain why we have been performing to standing room-only crowds since 1983.

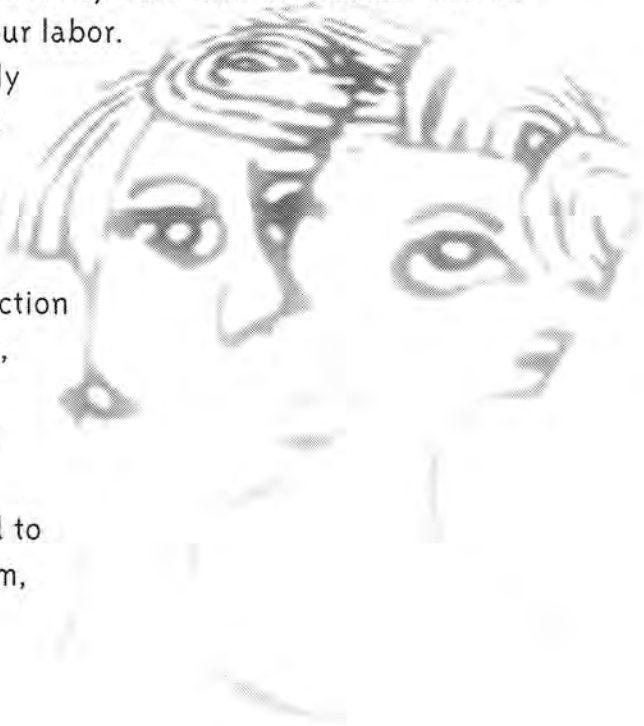
The chorus works hard to develop and refine our individual as well as group musical skills while encouraging friendship and the open exchange of beliefs and insights. We've put a lot of work into this season and we hope that you enjoy the fruits of our labor.

The Chorus has opened for Holly Near, Castlebury and Dupree, Fred Small, and numerous other

progressive performers. We have performed at benefits for and gatherings of the War Resisters League, The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, The National Abortion Rights Action League, Festival for the Eno, Crape Myrtle Festival, Artspace, North Carolina Pride Festival, Rape Crisis Center of Durham, CASA, The Battered Women's Shelter, Triangle Hospice, and numerous other organizations.

We also brought the women's professional softball crowd to its feet with an original arrangement of the National Anthem, which we performed at a rompin' Durham Dragons game.

The Common Woman Chorus ... we're worth coming out for!



**RAISING CONSCIOUSNESS ABOUT THE QUALITY OF WOMEN'S LIVES AND EXPERIENCES LOCALLY AND AROUND THE WORLD**



# home for the holidays ... **OUR WAY**

2 3 N O V E M B E R 2 0 0 2



On November 23, the Chorus's own Rosie O'Connellly hosts our holiday variety show—the television special you wish you could see on TV! Rosie reunites classmates from The Gertrude Stein Academy for the Exceptionally Androgynous Child and shares the Chorus's music with her guests. Special appearances by Ms. Claus, the dancing elves, Jesse ... and Rosie, of course.

This concert offers a light-hearted look at some of the challenges that the LGBT community encounters during the holiday season—from throwing a holiday brunch to shopping for the perfect gift to deciding where and with whom to celebrate. There will also be a more serious set of songs celebrating non-Christian traditions. Plus, the winner of the raffle for a free weekend getaway to the Hidden Treasure Inn will be announced! Enjoy a holiday laugh as the class takes Santa to task for his gender-specific gift choices. Gail Hafley and Crystal Lennon accompany this celebration of the holidays—food, family, stress ... and plenty of gait! TICKETS on sale now for \$12 at The Regulator Bookshop (Durham), Internationalist Books (Chapel Hill), and White Rabbit Books (Raleigh) 8 PM ENO RIVER UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP 4907 GARRETT ROAD DURHAM

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—And She Will Rise  
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—How Could Anyone?  
by Libby Roderick

# LOVE love love

8 F E B R U A R Y 2 0 0 3



The Triangle Gay Men's Chorus and the Common Woman Chorus host a fabulous Valentine's concert and dance featuring old favorites and romantic standards. This is our first performance at Raleigh's BTI Performing Arts Center. Rubyslipper Dance Asylum hosts a dance at the nearby Raleigh Sheraton

immediately after the concert. TICKETS \$15 (orchestra seating in advance), \$18 (orchestra seating at the door), and \$25 (gold-circle seating). CWC's gold-circle proceeds will be donated to local women's charities. Tickets available from The Regulator Bookshop (Durham), Internationalist Books (Chapel Hill), and White Rabbit Books (Raleigh)  
8 PM BTI PERFORMING ARTS CENTER RALEIGH

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## HEROES



### a celebration of women

F A L L 2 0 0 3

The chorus proudly celebrates  
twenty years of feminist musicmaking!

Join us in celebrating women whose love, strength, creativity, and strength inspire us all. This multimedia choral event features visual presentations of unforgettable women. Don't miss our new song that celebrates the life and times of Barbara Jordan THE HEROES CONCERT FALL 2003



# the early YEARS

T H E C H O R U S C E L E B R A T E S  
O U R M U S I C A L H E R S T O R Y

The chorus was the brainchild of Nancy Agnew and Barbara Anderson, who, each having moved from other cities with choruses, independently thought that a women's chorus was needed in the Triangle. As I recall, both were at a TALF meeting and announced their idea. A sign-up sheet was circulated that evening and many women signed up. Twenty to twenty-five women were at the organizational meeting.

All we lacked was a director. We stumbled along for a few months until a miracle occurred and Eleanor Sableski came into our lives and led us for the next seventeen years.

Way back then, music that we wanted to sing was a lot harder to come by. Looking back on the first year or two, we joke that all we knew were three songs, which we sang with gusto wherever we had the opportunity—while praying that they did not ask for an encore!

Those formative years required much talk about organization and philosophy. Business meetings sometimes took two separate evenings! Even choosing a name was a multi-week process. But, over time, the chorus jelled and became the fun place that it is today! Over the years, many women have come through the chorus. I believe that the camaraderie has made them the better for it. It certainly did for me. The Chorus will always hold a warm spot in my heart.

—LEANN WALLACE

Shortly after moving here from Kansas City, I realized that I missed the sense of community, fun times, and learning experience that I had felt as a member of the Kansas City Women's Chorus. I had been a member of that chorus and participated with it in the Sister Singers Network of women's choruses around the country and I had a whole notebook full of arrangements. (The Kansas City arranger, Catherine Strom, did "Polly Wolly," among other things that the CWC has sung.) So, I thought, how about creating another such organization, since I'd had such fun with it in Missouri!

Some of my goals for the group were to sing songs either by or about women, to sing things that gave us a chance to learn (about life, music, singing or whatever), and to keep it a non-auditioned group so that any interested woman who was willing to work at it could participate. I had long remembered the poem about the Common Woman, more specifically the punchline "and will rise," and hoped for a way to build community, have fun, enjoy singing, and perhaps to stay connected with The Sisters Singers Network. Most of these have come to pass and I feel a maternal pride when I attend concerts and hear what is happening with the group.

—NANCY AGNEW

(continued next page)

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We met with a common goal: to sing. But, we spent a lot of time talking. It was the early 1980s and consensus was in. Though our numbers were small, our opinions were many, and all strongly held. We settled fairly easily on the idea of basing our name on the Judy Grahn poem, but processed long and hard over whether we were a choir or a chorus and, more importantly, whether we were "common women" or "common womyn." Eventually, we turned our attention to harmony, and the Common Woman Chorus was born. We sang about equality, justice, and tolerance. We sang for radical causes, such as gay rights and world peace. And, while the focus has broadened since that time, the music has never stopped. The Chorus has grown beyond the care of its founding mothers and has become a self-sustaining, fluid group of dedicated women who are all about the music. Uncommonly good women and uncommonly good music.

—MIRIAM BAER

I answered an ad seeking women interested in forming/becoming part of a chorus. Nancy placed the ad in *The Newsletter*. As one of the few women with no musical background, I watched in awe as Nancy, LeAnn, and Barbara Anderson provided the musical and organizational leadership that kept the chorus going week after week. It was a small and fascinating group of women with diverse missions: starting a women's chorus, advancing various feminist/leftist/radical causes, and singing. Into this mix stepped Eleanor Sableski, who gradually began to hammer us on her musical anvil and move us from a group who sang "Bread and Roses" and a few other pieces in the auditorium of the Durham Public Library to a notable choral group with a respectable repertoire. We opened for Holly Near in Page Auditorium (and that was only in 1988!), and the rest, as they say, is history.

—JUDY WINSTON

**THERE WAS MUSIC IN MY  
MOTHER'S HOUSE  
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MUSIC IN MY MOTHER'S HOUSE  
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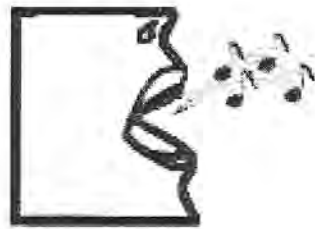
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# FEMINIST opera?

A CONVERSATION WITH ERIN O'HARA

The Chorus president is a diva. Yep, it's true. Erin O'Hara settled into the Raleigh arts community after touring with the National Opera Company for 3 years. She currently sings with The North Carolina Master Chorale Chamber Choir and The Waits, at St. Timothy's Church ... and with the Common Woman Chorus.

When new chorus members hear her sing, they sometimes joke that Erin must be slumming with a non-auditioned chorus such as ours that is more inclined to sing political tunes or barbershop spoofs than classical scores. In reality, though, Erin enjoys our progressive songs and inclusive community. "The Chorus," she says, "lets me express the feminist/lesbian side of myself that no other choirs celebrate. It's so wonderful to have the opportunity to express myself creatively with like-minded people."

Erin was born and raised in Ohio, where she received a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance from the College of Wooster. A scholarship to The University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music followed. She received her Master of Music in Vocal Performance from Cincinnati, then heard about a little NC opera company that hired singers to travel the country performing operas.

She began her 3-year apprenticeship in the Tarheel state in 1979 and immediately staged 2 operas.

The National Opera Company took opera to places where it would have otherwise never been. It also provided new graduates with direct, intense experience in good production and performance, performing a new opera every 10 days or so. Erin estimates that they were on the road at least 90 days a year. They spent a significant portion of that time sitting in a van that transported them from one spot to another—and everyone carried sets and worked sound.

Erin especially enjoyed seeing the little towns, which provided the group everything from a Mr. Microphone to professional sets. And she appreciated the many talented New York City directors who came down to stage the various operas.

The National Opera Company gig was a 3-year apprenticeship. Many singers moved on to New York City afterwards. Erin, however, stayed in Raleigh.

"Originally, I just didn't want to move to New York right away," she says. "But I had every intention of going. Eventually, though, I decided that I really didn't want to be one of those singers who just waits tables her whole career. I began to realize that I would probably do more here than in New York."

She got the church job and joined the Raleigh Oratorio Society (now the Master Chorale) right away. She performed Triangle Dinner Theater. She taught music at a small community college in Hickory. She taught voice. And, eventually, she joined The Waits.

The Waits began as a group of friends who started carolling in the Oakwood section of Raleigh. They developed into a professional group that dresses in 16-century English costumes and sings for corporate functions and various organizations. The holidays are their busiest season, but they still find time to go carolling in Oakwood at least one night a season.

Erin knew in elementary school that music was her calling. There was always choral singing. The flute lessons began in sixth grade and voice lessons followed. She sang in choirs and performed the leading role in musicals—Lauri in *Oklahoma*; Liesl in *The Sound of Music*; Rebecca in *Tom Sawyer*.

"If what you are best at is music—be it writing or the fine arts—then it's so important to follow your calling in order to develop your best qualities," she says. "If you don't, then how can you possibly be good at anything else? The arts help you in every aspect of your life."



Nowadays, Erins performs and works backstage with Raleigh Little Theater. She performs at CC's piano bar, often with Sandi Sullivan, another Common Woman Chorus first soprano. And she performs with North Carolina Theater and with Opera North Carolina in addition to her other gigs.

"I love the arts community here," she says.

"There's lots to do. Lots of theater and choirs. I love the weather, the beach, and the mountains. If I did music full-time, I'd get bored with it. As it is, I can be a computer geek by day and a music geek at the same time. It gives me variety."

"The older I get, the more I realize how important music is. So many people just work. They have no passion. I've seen them find music though and, all of a sudden, they're different."

"In some ways, they have found an escape. And it's true that nothing else frees you quite the same as the physical act of singing. It is such an emotional release—almost like being an athlete. The physical act of singing is very satisfying to me. I spend so much time training my voice that it really is like going out and running a race. I just see what my voice can do."

It doesn't get tested quite as much now as when she traveled the country performing operas, Erin says, but some pieces are still challenging and the satisfaction continues to be in putting it all together.



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Collection of the Orlando Museum of Art, Florida.  
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"This book is sharp, funny, and deeply significant to current understandings of what is at stake in what are reductively called 'the marriage debates.' A must-read for activists and policymakers as well as across the disciplines."—Lisa Duggan, author of *Sapphic Slashes: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*

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On behalf of the Common Woman Chorus, I would like to personally thank each of you for your support of our fund-raising efforts. We understand that not everyone has the financial means to help us in extra ways such as this. Please accept this acknowledgment as our sincere thanks and appreciation. Your generosity has moved the Chorus that much closer to having the ability to obtain risers.

Currently, the Board is evaluating storage space and the cost of ownership. We hope to move forward with the purchase when the Chorus has the ability to store and transport risers in a cost-effective way. The Board reserves the right to divert these funds to other operational areas if the need arises.

Thank You.

—RUTH HERUSKA, 2002 CWC TREASURER

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## CAN'T SING BUT WANT TO SUPPORT OUR EFFORTS?

The Chorus, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has served the community since 1983. Individual and corporate donations are greatly appreciated and vital to our continuing efforts. They enable us to rent rehearsal space, provide our director with a stipend, purchase music, and—we hope—risers one day.

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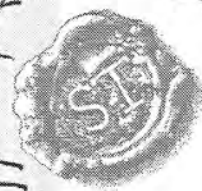
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This program is made possible in part through gifts to the Durham Arts Council United Arts Fund and support from the City of Durham.





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