

March 2011 AUDIENCE SURVEY

During the Celtic Spring concert in March 2011 we invited the audience to ask us anything they wanted – and we got some great questions !

Here's the first instalment of responses from choir members and board members – more to come.

What's the audition process?

Well, I barely remember my audition but you generally sing three pieces of contrasting genres (baroque, Romantic, 20th Century, etc.) followed by either some sight reading or a prepared song where you sing a cappella from start to finish. Members audition every two years although, to my knowledge, Lars has never let a member go based on a "bad" re-audition. He will recommend voice training if the re-audition doesn't go well.

-Miriam Davidson

The audition process can vary from year-to-year, but usually we are asked to warm-up, then sing 3 solo pieces that differ in style and language. The pieces should be chosen carefully to demonstrate our vocal ability, range, and experience. We are also given a selection to sight-read. It can be a little nerve-wracking sometimes, but it is an important part of the choral process.

-Elspeth Finlay

How many times do the singers practice?

During our regular rehearsal each Tuesday night, it's pretty obvious where the problem spots are that we need to work on individually. Everybody's individual practice routines are different, but I find it's very useful to sit down and work on a single spot for a short period of time, say 20 minutes, a few times per week. I find it's best to just tackle one problem, and to do so in a very quick, focused approach, then to go over it again in a day or two, depending on how busy the given day is. The amount of practice is always different, as sometimes there are more problem areas, and sometimes there are less, but that's my approach.

-Ryan Noakes

We rehearse 2.5 hours per week together. As for practicing individually, that depends on how well you know the repertoire already and its difficulty. I have personally spent up to 60 hours practicing repertoire at home for a concert and that does not include regular technique practice. If it's particularly easy or if I have already done the music, I go over my notes about twice a week. Having written that, most of us practice technique and other singing on a nearly daily basis.

-Miriam Davidson

How does the choir keep from singing flat?

For me, the best way to avoid singing flat is to use good vocal technique, to practice at home with a piano in good tune and condition, and to listen to the other choir members around me.

-Elspeth Finlay

How do the singers find the first note if it is different from the pitch pipe?

When you study music, part of what you learn is theory, and part of what you learn is ear training. When Lars gives us a note on the pitch pipe, it's always the root of the key. We are able to read the music, figure out what key it is, and then figure

out if we are singing the root note, or a different note. If it's a different note, we use our ear training knowledge to figure out the interval from the note we hear to the note we have to sing. So, if we're in F Major, we know Lars will play an F, and if we sing an F it's easy as pie! Otherwise, we look at what our first note is, and figure out where it fits in the chord, and sing the note in our heads so we hear it, and then we know what note to sing. It takes a bit of practice to get used to it, but once you've got it, you've got it.

-Ryan Noakes

Somewhere along the musical road, you learn how to find your pitch. Lars usually plays the tonic or the do of the piece (think of the first line of the song Do Re Mi). From there, we think of what interval our individual starting notes are from the tonic. For example, if Lars plays a C and you start on an E, then you think a major 3rd up from C (think of the song Oh When the Saints Go Marching

-Miriam Davidson

How often do you practice?

We have rehearsals once a week, and sometimes more leading up to a concert. As far as individual preparation, it varies from person to person. I like to practice vocal technique about 3-4 times a week, and then go over the music either at the same time or separately. Sometimes even just looking the music over and not singing is helpful.

-Catherine Crouch

Regular rehearsal time is once a week for 2 hours, 45 minutes, but leading up to a concert more rehearsals and dress rehearsals are often added.

-Elspeth Finlay

Do people eat a big dinner before performing?

I prefer to have a decent dinner before I sing. I get grumpy if I don't eat regularly. But, I'm always careful to make sure I don't eat anything that will make me burp, or gum up my throat. Having a good dinner helps give me the energy I need to give it all I've got in the concert.

-Ryan Noakes

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow choristers, that stand next to me, for not eating any garlic dishes before concert time :) I personally refrain from eating at least 3 hours prior to performance time.

-Heidi Ackermann

Personally I think Ryan is crazy... I can only eat a very light meal, and that several hours before hand, when I am going to perform. Part of that is the purely physical aspect of needing lots of room for diaphragmatic muscles to move around for breathing. The other part is that one of my responses to high adrenalin situations like performing is a slight case of stomach butterflies, so I really prefer to be empty. Of course this means that when the concert is over and the adrenalin crash hits I'm starving and should not be allowed into the presence of potato chips.

-Hilary Crowther

I eat a small to medium size dinner. It's never really mattered to me either way.

-Miriam Davidson

What is the most difficult piece you have ever sung?

The most difficult piece I have ever sung is Berio's A-Ronne for 8 amplified voices, when I was doing my B.Mus at UVic. It took us 7.5 months to learn it. Scary hard.

-Ryan Noakes

The most difficult piece so far is probably R. Murray Schafer's "Magic Songs"

-Heidi Ackermann

Bach has taught me that I am a closet masochist. He is unrelenting and unforgiving, as well as unforgettable and irresistible. He is an exercise for the intellect and the soul, leaving you trying to find the razor's edge balance between the two and tormenting you with the knowledge that you may never get it quite the way you want it to be. Sigh... it hurts so good.

-Hilary Crowther

A Japanese piece with the VICO. I can't remember the title.

-Miriam Davidson

How did you get so awesome ?

Lots of practice and a little natural talent all rolled into one...not that I'm biased or anything!

~Elspeth Finlay

How does Heidi sing that high?? Awesome.

It takes practice and time conditioning my voice to sing the higher notes as it's not so common in pieces that the soprano voice part goes up to high C. For me, it takes a combination of preparing physically and mentally to reach it. Warming up my voice with numerous exercises that condition my higher range before I attempt to sing the actual piece is essential. And I guess you could say I trick my mind into feeling as though the note is an easy one to reach. It's all about relaxing your mind and allowing your body to support the note with good posture and full breath control.

-Heidi Ackermann

Are you excited to play/sing with the North Shore Celtic Ensemble? 😊

Absolutely, they are such a talented bunch!

~Elspeth Finlay

Other than classical, what genre of music do the choir members listen to most? (generally)

I listen to a lot of a cappella groups (not choirs, rock bands with no instruments!), jazz, contemporary art music, and rock bands encompassing everything from the Barenaked Ladies to Radiohead.

-Ryan Noake

I listen to a wide variety of music. It's easier to list the kinds I don't like which are new country or death metal.

-Heidi Ackermann

I am a compulsive "singer -aloner," and so tend to listen to music with a strong melodic line in my range. I love Ella Fitzgerald, the Beatles, Broadway, Simon and Garfunkle, classic rock and so on. You won't find a lot of dance music on my ipod because there is nothing for me to sing.

-Hilary Crowther

Of course, I love classical, baroque and early 20th Century - both instrumental and choral music. However, I really like Rush, Sarah Harmer, Radiohead and Gillian Welch.

--Miriam Davidson

What do the choristers do when they're not singing?

Raising kids and teaching but other than that, we really don't have lives. In fact, we're so geeky, we make Star Trek geeks look like hipsters.

-Miriam Davidson

I am a fulltime Elementary School Teacher, so that keeps me busy, but Laudate's choir members are a diverse crew, with many different careers and hobbies!

~Elspeth Finlay

Like the new costumes for the female singers. The cardigan design doesn't work as well as the designs with the ties at the front or back. Should pick one design rather than a mix.

Actually all the tops are the same! We wanted to pick a design that could allow the individual to express their own personal look. Some concerts may dictate a "similar" tying of the tops, but usually we are wanting a cohesive look colour-wise while still allowing for different heights and body types and personal style.

-Lesley Finlay

Men need vests or hankies

Hankies are already made....we had them made out of the same material as the ladies tops. We are looking at black dress shirts for the men and of course will continue to use tuxs for the more formal concerts.

-Lesley Finlay

Who designed the new ladies' outfits?

It came from an existing garment that I owned that worked for all types of figures. The colour was chosen because it flatters all skin and hair colours. A committee was made up of choir and board members to add input, the actual sewing was done by Asa Eidelhof.

-Lesley Finlay

Pretty well every word ! (under the question What part of the printed program do you read?)

Wow! I'm delighted you read the program! We work hard to include material in it that will help you enjoy the music to its fullest. The notes and translations are the core of it, in my mind. We try to give information that will be interesting to all listeners regardless of their music background, and that will prepare you to appreciate the music's beauty and meaning. When I'm listening to the choir sing, I like to have the text in front of me so that I can follow along. While the choir's enunciation is good, often the structure of the piece makes it difficult to hear the words exactly. I find that seeing the words helps me appreciate their performance in a much deeper way.

-Anne Kaario

Hmm.. not sure yet about the visuals. Tonight they are beautiful, but are they necessary? How do you choose the images?

The visuals were added recently and we are still exploring the impact they have, as well as the best way to use them. The photos were chosen to add some aesthetic beauty as well as to enhance and build on the chosen theme of each concert. Usually, I start by brainstorming words and images that would make sense for the concert's theme, then choose the images that best fit my overall vision.

~Elspeth Finlay

Pictures linking the music to its history or place of origin.

When possible, I always choose images that link the music to its history or place of origin. For instance, I have often used images of the cathedral a composer was associated with or images of the country a particular work was associated with. The only time I do not is if it is not possible to find images of a particular place, if I do not have any information on an associated place, or if the chosen theme does not seem to suit pictures of a historical nature.

~Elspeth Finlay

Rotating video feed of singers, the synth player and Lars would be nice!

A good idea! We will consider this!

~Elspeth Finlay

The pictures are great. Consider changing them throughout the music.

As a choir volunteer but also an audience member, I really enjoy having the projected images. Sometimes they add real understanding such as when there is a picture of the composer or the place where the music was written; sometimes the pictures add to the emotion of the piece. And occasionally it provides another avenue for contemplation rather than closing my eyes.

-Anne Kaario

Are the pictures a distraction? They seem so to me.

This is a good point and one we have considered. I choose the pictures in the hopes that they add to the aesthetic, not take attention away from the show. One way I hope to limit distraction is by having one still picture for each song, rather than several rotating pictures for each piece. We have received positive feedback, but we will endeavour to continue improving our presentation in a way that adds, not detracts.

-Elspeth Finlay

Is Lars married? A fan.

Yes! Definitely! Emphatically! Lars is married! To me. And you can't have him. We've been married happily since 1980 and have one child, Laura, now 16. Laura and I are both volunteers for Laudate, supporting a choir we know is dear to Lars but also to us, its singers and many others.

~ Anne Kaario