

## VI - THE CHOIR AND SOLOISTS

From the Denton Bach Society's inception, the choir, with its conductors, has been the backbone of the organization. Other persons clearly have been essential--instrumentalists, soloists, officers, donors--but it has been the singers who have been the organization's mainstay.

As described in the previous section, the choir has been featured in virtually all of the Denton Bach Society's regular season concerts. In 1992, the Board of Directors voted to "distinguish the choral component from the Society as a whole by giving the chorus its own name: 'the Denton Bach Choir'." Thereafter it was accorded separate billing in program notes.

Singing at or near a professional level at concert is the choir members' chief contribution. The choir sings "new" pieces at nearly every performance of every season, and in preparation the members are expected to spend virtually all of their late Sunday afternoons, from September to May, in rehearsals. They must attend additional rehearsals prior to a concert, including the dress rehearsal, at which time the instrumentalists join the group. Unlike the instrumentalists, the choristers work without compensation.

The choir members have also performed various tasks for the organization, and have done much of the behind-the-scenes- work. They have served as stage-hands, setting up risers and moving instruments, chairs, and music stands. They have written, edited, and mailed the organization's newsletter; solicited advertising from businesses; distributed posters in churches and other community focal points announcing their programs.

Many have done heavy duty in the Society's organizational structure, having served on the Board of Directors and as officers. Indeed, until recent changes were effected in the bylaws, it was mandated that board members and officers be "performers."

Withal, the choir members have contributed financially, in a variety of ways. Singers pay for their own copy of the music performed. They provide their own transportation to out-of-town concerts. And a substantial number of them have made financial pledges to the Society.

Then there has been the Bachfest, an annual event which was the Society's primary fund-raising enterprise until 1993. For twelve years, the Denton Bach Society brought this event of feasting, fun, and frolic to the Denton community in October. Not surprisingly, it was the choir members who were called upon to supply the bulk of the manpower.

Who are these people, who have given so generously of their time and talents, many of them for years on end--and who have produced such wonderful music?

Choir membership is open to the public. Word-of-mouth has always been an important recruiting device, and every year a call is sounded by the organization for additional volunteers to sing in the choir. Auditions are sometimes held, where singers are invited to "sing an aria or song of their own choosing," but "extensive musical or vocal training" is not required. "If you can read music, you are welcome in the Bach Society Chorus!" says one recent invitation.

A substantial number of the members have professional training or background, but the majority, according to Director Henry Gibbons, "are in fact amateurs in the best sense of the word, persons of many different backgrounds using their natural ability and uniting through their love of music" (Vivace!, Vol. XIV, No. 1).

There are some self-selecting factors, however. The type of music that the Bach Choir sings is complex, somewhat more demanding than much church choral music to which many singers are accustomed. Mastering it involves hard work and a serious commitment to excellence. Moreover, the music of Bach, like many other great works of art, is somewhat of an acquired taste; not many people have sufficient exposure to it to develop the special appreciation which singing in a Bach choir involves.

Hence the Denton Bach Choir has never been very large. The average size of the choir over the years has been thirty-two, and there has been some waxing and waning by season. At times, choir size has dipped below twenty, and it has risen above forty.

Information on choir membership can only be drawn from program notes, and, as has already been mentioned, programs for some of the concerts during the early years could not be obtained. This resulted in some undercount, but at least one choir listing was available for each of the twenty seasons. Since singers tended to participate on a seasonal basis, this undercount is somewhat minimized. Nevertheless, an attempt was made to develop a census based on the 78 choir listings available of choir members, and to devise a summary of each member's participation. This listing is found in Appendix C.

The program for the very first performance on October 24, 1976, listed the following thirty-seven singers:

**Sopranos**

Elaine Briceland  
Jane Brough  
Lorri Carlson  
Phyllis Eccleston  
Hildegard Froehlich  
Sylvia Grier  
Mary Kay Little  
Carolyn Smith

**Tenors**

Billy J. Ham  
Hartmut Kahlert  
Lloyd Smith  
Michael Weden  
Steve Wottrich

**Altos**

Nancy Brown  
Sallie Bynum  
Emily Crocker  
Lurline DuPree  
Lina Kirkpatrick  
Barbara Pettit  
Jo Schwegler  
Peg Bie Shauck  
Ange Singleton  
Sue Smith  
Nancy Stephenson  
Linda Walter  
Winifred Wilson

**Basses**

William L. Adams  
George Basbas  
David Carlson  
Richard DuPree  
Chuck Gatlin  
Hugh Kirkpatrick  
Donald Little  
Barton Robinson  
Mike Rush  
Herbert Schaake  
Jay Trimble

Nine more people joined the choir during the first season. Their names are as follows:

**Sopranos**

Mary Ann Barnhart  
Rebecca King  
Clare Rappole

**Altos**

Sandra Gilbert  
Marcia Henderson  
Lynn Yakes

**Tenors**

John Hepner  
Coralie Key  
Raul Mattei

Three persons who sang in the first concert of the inaugural season also sang in the last concert of the twentieth season: Hildegard Froehlich, Billy J. Ham, and Sue Smith. Hildegard has already been mentioned as a co-founder and co-director in the early years, and has served the organization in various capacities. Billy, a tenor, participated in 19 seasons. And Sue surely deserves some medal for loyalty. By her own reckoning, she has missed only one concert in which the Denton Bach Choir performed, and only one rehearsal, in twenty years!

Following is a list of the number of singers, by section, whose names have appeared on available programs:

Sopranos	103
Altos	107
Tenors	62
Basses	80

These numbers represent some overlap, however, since eleven women sang soprano or alto, in different concerts, and two men sang tenor or bass in separate concerts. After deducting this overlap, we find that 339 different persons are on record as having sung in the Bach Choir at least once.

A tally of the numbers of singers in the four main sections of the choir on a concert-by-concert bases yields the following average profile: eight sopranos, nine altos, six tenors, and nine basses. This imbalance is not extreme, but it bears out anecdotal evidence that the Choir has experienced some personnel shortages. Three women have sung in the tenor section: Sue Fairbrother, Coralie Key, and Carey White. This is testimony to the overlap in ranges of alto and tenor voices--and to the shortage of tenors in the Denton Bach Choir during the early years.

A season-by-season tally reveals a paradox: a constant and sizeable turnover of choir members, and a small group of loyal and dependable participants as well. Well over one-half (62 percent) of the 339 persons who have sung in the Bach Choir did so only for one season, and more than three-fourths (77 percent) sang in only one or two seasons. Still, there seems to have been a "moving core" of committed members that has carried over from year to year, which has given the choir a remarkable stability.

It would be impossible to identify the members of this moving core, but special mention can at least be given to a few of the longtime and frequent singers.

## Ranking the Denton Bach Society Singers

Seasons Performed		Number of performances	
Hildegard Froehlich	20	Sue Smith	75
Sue Smith	20	Hildegard Froehlich	67
Billy J. Ham	19	Billy J. Ham	65
William L. Adams, Jr.	18	William L. Adams, Jr.	65
Marcia Henderson	17	Lina Kirkpatrick	59
Lina Kirkpatrick	16	Hugh Kirkpatrick	58
Hugh Kirkpatrick	16	Marcia Henderson	58
Deanna D. Bush	15	Mary Ann Barnhart	45
Mary Ann Barnhart	14	Deanna D. Bush	41
Richard Edyvean	13	Richard Edyvean	40
Frank Feigert	12	Frank Feigert	39
Patricia Barton	11	Jeff Peters	38
Dianne Penney	11	Patricia Peters	37
Jeff Peters	11	Dianne Penney	36
Patricia Peters	11	John C. Hepner	32
John C. Hepner	10	Patricia Barton	30
Pat Morey	10	Julian Long	30
		Coralie Key	29
		P. Martin Sarvis	28
		Susan Treacy	28
		Paul Dutka	26
		Carol Kernek	26
		Pat Morey	26
		Agnes Rogers	25
		Mary Kay Little	23
		Therese de St. Aubin	23
		Diane Follet	23
		Donald Little	22
		Victoria F. Jones	21

The cutoff points on these overlapping honor rolls is arbitrary, and hence unfair to many additional persons whose devotion and contributions have also been substantial.

Soloists. Many professional vocal soloists have performed with the Denton Bach Choir concerts. While some have been recruited from around the country, a substantial number have come from the north central Texas area and, more specifically, from Denton's two universities, Texas Woman's University and the University of North Texas. And, numerous soloists have been drawn from the choir itself.

Altogether, one hundred and fifty-three different persons have been listed in the programs as doing solo work. Eighty-five of these were guest soloists, and 68 were choir members. Names of guest soloists are listed in Appendix D. They include 16 sopranos, 12 altos, 23 tenors (including 4 countertenors), and 20 basses. Fourteen others are listed without voice identification.

Names of choir members who performed as soloists are identified in Appendix C. It is another measure of the level of professionalism of the Bach Choir that a fifth of its members have sung solo parts.

One soprano, Patricia Barton, is deserving of special mention. Ms. Barton, a graduate of Texas Woman's University, first sang with the choir in May, 1982, as the soloist in the *Coronation Mass* (K 317) by Mozart. With the exception of four seasons following this first appearance, Ms. Barton has been the featured guest soloist twenty-three times in major compositions presented by the Bach Society, including Bach's *Christmas Oratorio, Parts V and VI*, and Handel's *Messiah, Parts II and III*. She was the Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, the soloist in Haydn's *The Creation*, and in the last concert of the 20th season, she sang the demanding role of Tocher Zion in Handel's *Brockes Passion*.

Mary Kay Little, soprano, has been soloist at least 16 times, Susan Treacy, alto, 13 times, and Don Little, bass, 11 times. Alan Davis, Barbara Prince, Randal Rushing, Kevin Sutton, and Janel Woodruff have sung at least five times, while some two dozen others have sung at least twice.