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A 'single voice'

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A way to help achieve “balance” is to learn to give up your identity.

That’s not a piece of advice most people would want to follow, unless they were part of Arcata Choral Artists.

“Choral singing is so different than singing with a band,” choir member and Arcata’s Threadbare Dancewear owner Kevin Sharkey said. “You’re no more important than the person next to you.”

Arcata Choral Artists Director and Fortuna High School music instructor Jonathan Souza agreed.

Choral singing is about “coming together collaborating on each other’s strengths (and) coming together as a single voice,” he said.

One way to achieve this is to participate in an “intensive” choral workshop.

That’s Arcata Choral Artists’ directive.

Thirty-seven experienced singers began an Arcata Choral Artists workshop last week at Humboldt State University. The workshop is sponsored by Threadbare Dancewear and the Humboldt State University Music Department.

The workshop’s participants/performers will have a total of eight classes/rehearsals before the concert, which is scheduled for Friday at 7 p.m. at the First Congregational Church, 900 Hodgson St., Eureka.

Individual general admission will be \$10.

Participants have paid \$50 and that goes toward building a contemporary choral literature library.

Concert proceeds go toward funding the venue, visiting musicians, such as the Klamath String Quartet, and recording costs.

The concert will be recorded using Fortuna High’s mobile recording equipment.

The principal program organizers are Sharkey, Souza, his partner, Christina Stanard-Souza and pianist Annette Gurnee Hull.

The Friday program will include different styles within mostly contemporary American choral music, post-1950 to 2005.

This is Arcata Choral Artists’ second season.

The group was formed to fill a desire for a new challenge for Humboldt County singers, Souza said.

There are specific issues associated with choral singing and those include interpretation, tone, diction and balance, he said.

There are traditionally four vocal parts — soprano, alto, tenor and bass.

The goal is to balance the sound “without actually having to manufacture that by saying, ‘No more women. Let your husbands and sons sing,’” he said.

Other issues involve learning how to hear and learn as the group, rather than attempting to memorize an individual part.

“Through this intensive experience we grow,” Souza said. “In my case, I conduct at a higher level than I previously have.”

Sharkey said that this choir program melds different levels. Members’ ages range from 14 to 70.

“This kind of opportunity within the community is a great opportunity for people with all kinds of different experiences to come together (and) bring to your singing and your membership in the group the sum of all those experiences,” he said.

Choir member Bonnie Cyr, who has sung with Humboldt Light Opera Co., said that a goal is to “sound like you’re a larger piece of one voice.”

“It’s like you’re going down the same road with your arms around each other,” she said.

Travis Kane will be a junior at Fortuna High in the fall. Among his honors is a spot on the California Coastal Regional Honor Choir and that’s after having just discovered he could sing this year.

Souza helped him discover that and invited him into Arcata Choral Artists.

Kane had been solely an instrumental musician.

“When you have an instrument, you press down a certain key and a certain note comes out,” he said. “Singing is the easiest thing I’ve undertaken, but it’s the easiest thing to mess up.”

He said he believes the voice is “more organic.”

“It’s your voice coming out of you,” he said. “It’s not projecting through an instrument.”

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