

OCTOBER

Monthly Newsletter

Blue Ridge Chorale of Culpeper, Inc.



Ringers



Emmy and Bill Ward made a big move when they were in their fifties: something they hadn't planned. But, the company Bill worked for had changed hands and many jobs were cut, including his. Too young to retire, but too old to be competitive in the Tech market, Bill became despondent as he sent out resume after resume. Then, out of the blue, he got a call, a phone interview and then an on-site interview request for the following Wednesday.

Emmy was hesitant about moving away, but Bill needed work. "At my age, good jobs are hard to find. And, Gravesend Information

sounds great. I feel there's a niche for me. Let's see what I learn." He smiled at Emmy, his blue eyes twinkling. "We may have an adventure!"

That night, Bill reported that the interviews felt good, and the following day he received an offer. The Company arranged for a realtor to show him around the area that day, and he saw several houses he liked. He was so taken with a small Craftsman bungalow from the 1930's that he called Emmy and emailed photos to her.

"I want to accept the job and make an offer on this house, Emmy. It's perfect for us: just what we've been talking about. It's not fair to you, I know, settling for a house you haven't seen, but can you let me run with this? I guarantee you'll love it, and this town!"

Bill hadn't sounded that excited since well before his last job fell through, and Emmy didn't want to spoil his pleasure. *Well, why not? We'll be happy together wherever we are.* "Bill, this sounds good! But, let's think about overnight and talk tomorrow morning. Good night, dear."

Emmy looked up West Garden, Suffolk County, Long Island. The photos she saw made the place look wonderful: a quiet little town with nice facilities. Main Street showed a good mix of people comfortably dressed walking along the sidewalks, accompanied by

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BRC's 2016 Winter Events and Performances

November 20th, 5pm. Caroling
at Christmas Tree Lighting at
Culpeper Depot.

Concert: November 28th, 7pm. at
Dogwood Village

Concert: December 2nd, 7pm at
Prince Michel Vineyard

December 3rd, 11am – 4pm
Caroling at Country Shoppes

Concert: December 4th, 3pm at
Verdun Adventure Bound

December 16th, 6pm at Prospect
Hill Plantation



dogs, or pushing baby carriages or strollers. *Could this be as good as it looks?*

She looked back to the Google search, and a classified listing caught her eye. *The West Garden Community Chorus is looking for an experienced Choral Director. Contact info@wgcc.com for more information.*

"Wow!" Emmy directed the local chorus and was dreading leaving them. "This could be just the thing!"

They decided to take the plunge. He took care of all the arrangements before coming home, while Emmy brushed up her resume, emailed it to the info@ address and started clearing the attic. Moving was huge job, but they were as excited as little children. Soon, they were driving toward Montauk Point, and by mid-August, were settled in. They both loved the town, Bill loved his new job, and Emmeline was the new Director of the Community Chorus.

She met with the Board to plan the autumn's programs.

"Our best concert is always Halloween!" Thelma, the Board President, enthused. "We will have a lovely Holiday program, of course, but Halloween is our favorite."

"I've never set up a Halloween concert." Emmy admitted. "Can I use some of the songs you've performed before?"

Thelma blinked. "Oh – we *only* do songs we've done before. We never add new songs to this concert."

It was easy for Emmy to assemble the concert, but she worried, that they'd need many strong male voices for the dark tone of some of the songs. *I hope we get a good turnout at rehearsal!*

At the first rehearsal, sixteen singers showed up: six sopranos, seven altos, two basses and one lonely tenor. One more tenor, two altos and one more bass joined by the second rehearsal. This was not reassuring. The singers knew the music and had good voices, but there were not enough voices to carry the spooky lower registers of the Halloween music.

"Thelma, I don't know what to do. We don't have the right singers for this kind of music. The lightest piece we're singing is the "Theme from *The Addams Family*". Should we cancel?"

"Oh, no, Emmy. It's a tradition. Don't worry; it'll be perfect. Just keep working with our singers. You're fine."

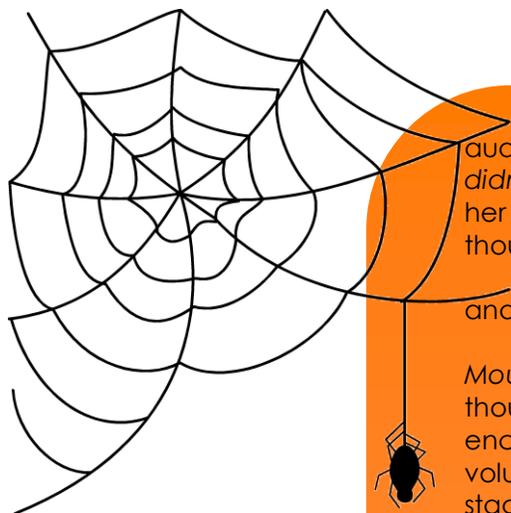
Is Thelma cooking on all her burners? "I don't see how this can work. Are we bringing in ghost singers?"

"I beg your pardon?" Thelma sounded shocked.

"By that, I meant ringers. You know, singers from another chorus."

Thelma sounded a bit huffy. "We will *only* have *our own* singers at Halloween." Her voice softened. "Emmy, you're new to us. We're... different from other groups. It takes getting used to. All of us in the Chorus have been here a while. We're used to things you'll find... unusual. You'll get used to them, too. Stop worrying."

October 31st arrived: All Saints' Eve, the eve of el Dia de los Muertos, Halloween. The



auditorium was packed. Peeking through the curtain, Emmy was surprised. *I didn't know that many people lived here!* She looked at the eager faces of her eighteen singers and silently prayed for things to go much better than she thought they could.

The Elementary School students performed a short Halloween sketch and paraded their costumes to warm applause.

Then, the High School orchestra played a selection from *Night on Bald Mountain*, while the Chorus filed on-stage. Standing in front of them, Emmy thought, "They look sort of lost on this big stage." But, she smiled encouragingly at them and they smiled back and stood up straight. The VFW volunteer flicked some switches, and the house lights dropped, then the stage darkened, making the effect of shadows from the corners moving in toward the singers. Jack-o-lanterns glowed at the corners of the stage and intermittent spots made it hard to see how many singers there actually were. *This lighting guy is good!* Emmy nodded to the accompanist, who started 'Things that Go Bump in the Night', and the singers picked up their cues perfectly.

Standing in the front center, Emmy could hear the entire chorus, pleased at how good it sounded, but puzzled, too. When Mozart's 'Dies Irae' came around, she could hardly believe what she was hearing. Every section was fully represented: the sound rich, deep, thrilling and perfectly coordinated. *It feels like I'm directing the Tabernacle Choir! How can this be?* Emmy wrenched her mind away from that distracting thought and stayed with the chorus. As the concert went on, though, she couldn't help noticing that the shadows to each side of the singers looked strangely filled, as if the Chorus was three or four times its actual size, with extra singers obscured in the shadows. *Stop it! Pay attention to your directing!*

By the end of the concert, the entire audience was on its feet, and the applause was thunderous. As lights went up, the little chorus of eighteen singers was again revealed.

There was a reception afterwards, and Emmy took Thelma aside. "You've got to tell me what happened up there, on the stage."

Thelma hesitated. "I suppose I must. You asked earlier about ringers from other choruses. These aren't 'ringers', they're our own singers, but our singers love being in the Chorus. It's just that all of... those who've, um, passed away, always show up to sing at Halloween. All Hallows Eve and that sort of thing, I guess you'd say. That's why we sounded that way.

"It doesn't record, by the way: I've tried several times, but we can only record the living singers. This is the one time of year we can really pull out the stops on the big sound compositions. Sit down, dear. You look a bit green."

Emmy did need to sit, but she needed to think, too. "Wow! This is a lot to assimilate." She brightened up, "But we sounded great! What an experience! Do you think..."

Thelma smiled at her. "No, Emmy, don't even ask. They don't come back for Christmas. It's only Halloween."

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History of our Seasonal Songs

Greensleeves

Though it is sometimes attributed to Henry VIII himself, the origins of the melody “Greensleeves” are not clear, but the form of the song for that time makes it likely that it originated in Italy, not England. It goes back at least to Elizabethan time and is mentioned in Shakespeare’s *Merry Wives of Windsor*, written in 1580, where the character Mistress Ford refers twice to ‘Greensleeves’. Falstaff embraces her, saying, “Let the sky rain potatoes; let it thunder to the tune of ‘Green Sleeves;’ hail kissing-comfits and snow eringoes; let there come a tempest of provocation, I will shelter me here.” (an *eringo* is a decorative plant with a thistle-like head).

What Child is This?

This well-loved song, set to the ancient melody “Greensleeves”, is very popular in the USA, even more than in England, where it originated. Here’s the story:

William Chatterton Dix was a manager at an insurance company in England in the 1860’s, but it may be that insurance wasn’t where his heart was. He came from a family that loved literature, and in fact he was named for Thomas Chatterton (1752-1780), the young Romantic poet who died before he was twenty and had the dubious distinction of becoming the poster child for the ‘starving artist’ phenomena of the 18th and 19th centuries. Poor Thomas Chatterton wrote some good poetry before his sad, early death.

William, not surprisingly, had poetic ambitions as well, but he also had a job that kept him tied to dreary earthly matters. He did his job well and responsibly it seemed, and reached a management position in his late 20’s. Then, he fell ill from some unspecified disease, was seriously ill for many months and sank into a depression.

As he started to recover, Thomas recognized how close to death he had come and had a burst of creative energy.

He had taken to reading the Bible while an invalid, and decided to write hymns as an act of gratitude for

his recovery. One of these, “The Manger Throne”, was a six verse poem written in 1865. Dix saw a natural link among three of the verses. He removed them from the poem and named them “What Child is This?” In 1871, the words and tune were published together by John Stainer. The pairing was hugely successful.

We don’t know if Dix went back to insurance, but he did continue writing (good for him!) and published more than forty hymns.

Thank you to Wikipedia and christmasclassics.com/christmasmusic for all this good information.

A Wassail Thought

from Wassail Song by Ralph Vaughan Williams

Come, butler, come fill us a bowl of the best;
Then I pray that your soul in heaven may rest;
But if you do bring us a bowl of the small,
May the Devil take butler, bowl and all!

Christmas Recipes

Surprisingly, there is more than one contemporary song circulating about fruitcake. One of them apparently has to do with standing naked in traffic. But...

Our Christmas Concert’s “Fruitcake Song”, by Philip Hagemann and Penny Lek, is a celebration of the many nice things that make up a fruitcake. Just like the holidays themselves, there is a central ‘given’ “positively, absolutely must be made with fruit”. Then there are lively, lovely options and add-ins such as “Cinnamon cinnamon – don’t forget the cinnamon”. Voices mingle and blend but the flavors stay distinct like the ingredients of a fruitcake, and the result is nutty and sweet to hear, and a real taste of Christmas.

