

Come Together:  
An Ethnography of the Seattle Men's Chorus Family

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**Abstract**

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This ethnography of the Seattle Men's chorus adds to the growing body of literature examining the culture of community choruses. The purpose of this ethnography was to examine the culture of a highly successful community men's chorus with particular attention to the musical and social interactions of its members in rehearsal and in post-rehearsal gatherings. The shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices of the Seattle Men's Chorus, the largest community chorus in North America and the largest gay men's chorus in the world were explored. This research utilized ethnographic techniques in gathering information that encompasses participation in this chorus, including an account of aims, processes, rehearsal outcomes, concerts, and events. Weekly and production-week rehearsals, retreats, concerts, outreach events, post-rehearsal gatherings, general meetings, and other community events were carefully

documented over a two-and-a-half year period. The data were coded, categorized, and analyzed for themes and relationships.

The Seattle Men's Chorus exhibited a complex network of relationships that may serve as a model for community choruses. The overarching theme that emerged was the community chorus as a "chosen family" that provides friendship, support, and a sense of self-worth to its members. More importantly, evidence revealed the presence of "social capital," a theory sociologists use to explore the maximizing of relationships on three different levels: bonding, bridging, and linking. The presence of all three types of social capital in the Seattle Men's Chorus is the crux of this study's examination into why it is so successful. The interplay of social capital and a shared musical experience led to the transformation of hearts and minds among the members of the chorus, the artistic director, and the audience. With the hope of serving as a model for artistic directors and the greater choral community, the indicators of social capital in the chorus are discussed and a model of the relationships among the chorus, artistic director, and the community are presented with implications for practice.

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## **Dedication**

To Dennis Coleman and the Seattle Men's Chorus

For their work in bringing the community together through song.

## Chapter I

### Introduction and Literature Review

It is a chilly January evening in downtown Seattle. I walk up the hill to Plymouth Congregational Church and into the brightly lit rehearsal room, which is buzzing and full of energy. Men move folding chairs from large racks and place them into multiple rows while others set up a music stand with a stand light, stool, and microphone on stage. People stroll into the room and hang up their jackets. Laughter and muffled voices float out from the adjoining kitchen as food is being prepped for the fellowship time. There is an air of familiarity as friends greet one another with hugs, smiles, nods, and even kisses on the cheek. There are even bigger greetings to those who have been absent for a couple of weeks. There is also a sense that the clock ticks on towards the appointed start time. A chord on the piano is played inviting us all to turn our attention to the front of the room where a friendly-looking gentleman steps up to the microphone on stage. Three hundred fifty minds and voices are drawn to the leader whose voice commands a sense of fatherly respect. Thus begins an evening with the Seattle Men's Chorus (SMC), North America's largest community chorus with over 350 singing members, an operation budget of over \$3 million, and a full-time staff of 12 plus. I, the researcher, am left pondering the age-old ethnographic question, "What is going on here?" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 74).

There are 270,000 choruses in the United States (Chorus America, 2009) including the SMC. The average volunteer chorus has a performing membership size of 81 (Chorus America, 2013, p. 6). Only 8.6% of volunteer choruses employ full-time staff members while 2.4% employ part-time staff members (Chorus America, 2013, p. 6). While it is not every chorus's goal to have a large membership, there are lessons to be learned from the success of the SMC.

Indeed, there are choruses whose very survival may depend on the ability to increase their singing membership, volunteer base, and audience.

### **Ethnography in Choral Music**

A chorus is more than the sum of its figures. Merely examining the statistics of the SMC would reveal the “what” but not the “how” and the heart of this organization. Small (1998) coined the term *musicking* [italics added] to reflect his philosophy that music was a process (verb) and not an object (noun). According to Small,

The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world (p. 13).

Grounded in the philosophy of Small, this research seeks to widen the circle of our attention to the entire set of relationships inherent in the Seattle Men’s Chorus. To meet these aims, I chose to conduct an ethnographic mode of inquiry, which has its roots in the fields of anthropology and sociology (Creswell, 2014). In this mode of research, the researcher examines a cultural group to determine its shared patterns of behavior, language (in this case, vocabulary), and actions in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time (Creswell, 2014).

A small, growing body of literature examines the culture of choirs through an ethnographic lens. The studies in the review that follows, while employing ethnographic

methodology, advanced different fields of study such as music education (Bartolome, 2010; Kennedy 2009), education (Titcomb, 2000; Townsend 1996), ethnomusicology (Barz, 1997; Okigbo, 2010), folklore studies (McEwen, 2011), and the emerging field of medical ethnomusicology, which focuses on issues of music, medicine; health and healing, within the context of cultural practices (Youngblood, 2013). While the choruses that were studied differ highly in their demographics, expressing their identity through song was a recurrent theme. The following review will highlight the findings of both international and Seattle-specific ethnographic studies of choral culture. The literature review will discuss both identity-based inquiries, that is, a study that focuses on the anthropology or make up of the personnel as well as social-based inquiries, which focus on the sociology or social systems of the ensembles. The current study falls into the latter category by examining the sociology of a choral ensemble.

**Identity-based inquiries.** McEwen's (2011) research focused on the moratorium on cod fishing in Newfoundland. The Folk of the Sea Choir was founded to help deal with the loss of income and a source of long-held identity. McEwen interviewed the participants in the choir and discovered that the act of recalling a performance evoked very strong memories and emotions of the experience. Coming together in a choral context helped them to process their fears. The result was a sense of unity and identity even in the midst of loss.

Barz (1997) and Okigbo (2010) both conducted studies in Africa. Barz (1997) examined the history, social organization, and aesthetics of a contemporary urban Lutheran choir in Tanzania and discovered a post-colonial identity that was emerging through contemporary choir performance. Okigbo's (2010) research took him to South Africa where he studied the organizational dynamics and performance of a HIV/AIDS Choir. He came to the conclusion that the ensemble was a place of empowerment and social support. In addition, the same resources

and fervor that fought Apartheid were now being used in the fight against AIDS. Similar to McEwen's study, the community in Okigbo's study came together as a choir in response to a community challenge.

Youngblood (2013) examined the growth and healing process in WomanSong, an all-female community chorus in South Carolina. She used their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert as a way to document the identity and aspirations of the 75-member chorus, nearly half of whom were lesbians. Through examination of the musical performance, she discovered that the chorus was a place of health, healing, celebration, and expression. She predicted that the chorus would continue to thrive since they were meeting the needs of the members and the greater community.

Townsend (1996) sought to describe the teaching, learning, literature, and context of an African American Baptist church choir. The purpose of this study was to glean teaching practices that could be applied in public school settings. Townsend discovered that the learning style of this ensemble was example-based and practiced-based, sometimes referred to as rote teaching in other contexts. Townsend called for further research in other churches, university gospel choirs, and other cultures.

Morgan (1992) conducted an ethnographic study on the culture of a high school choir who had attained superior ratings in state competitions. The purpose was to explore the behavior of the director and the students' perceptions of the director's behavior. Morgan discovered that the director focused on note learning and interpretation in his rehearsals. In addition, the students viewed musicking in the ensemble as their "work." The culture created by the ensemble and director resulted in a choir that favored musical learning over social rewards. The study concluded that teachers have great influence over their students and their perceptions of learning.

Kennedy (2009) also took a music educational bent in her research focusing on a large

300-member inter-generational, non-auditioned choir. Like Townsend, Kennedy hoped to inform formal teaching situations by examining the music teaching and learning in the informal context of this choir. Kennedy discovered that there was a strong sense of community and many said that the chorus had transformed the lives of the members. In regards to the learning processes, there was a high importance placed on aural learning and memorizing music in order to connect more fully with their audiences, a practice that I also observed as significant in the current study.

**Social-based inquiries.** Titcomb (2000) looked at the process of learning through a sociological lens, examining how group process and culture interact and influence adult learning in groups. Her research revealed a social system that was complex, nonlinear, and dynamic. There was an overall theme of music as worship, which was appropriate for the religious context. Titcomb used complexity science, the study of complex nonlinear dynamical systems, to help describe the emerging patterns of core values. Of interest to my research, observations and interviews pointed to the conductor as a great influence in the learning experience and quality of the ensemble. However, the conductor revealed that his formal musical preparation did not adequately prepare him in the areas of group and interpersonal dynamics. Of all of these ethnographic studies exploring choral culture, Titcomb is the only researcher to include the conductor of the ensemble in the study. In addition, she calls for more research on the preparation of conductors and the impact of group training on musical ensemble product. In contrast to the conductor in Titcomb's research, the current study's artistic director demonstrated a strong command of both the elements of musical leadership and preparation and an ability to adapt to the group and interpersonal dynamics of the ensemble.

Bartolome (2010) examined the culture of the Seattle Girls' Choir, a highly successful auditioned girls choir, with specific attention directed towards the benefits of membership,

expressed values, and observed behavior. She discovered a girl-centered culture that focused on nurturing the singers while contributing musically to the greater community. Bartolome likened the community of the girls to a tribe with their own system of governance and ownership. She called for further research into the perceived values and benefits of participation in a choir as well as the role of technology in interpersonal communication. In addition, she highlighted the need for more research that utilized the language of the singers in its reporting.

According to Morrison (2001), “No music exists in a vacuum. All music comes from someone and someplace, at some point in time, and for some purpose” (p. 24). All of the aforementioned ethnographic studies helped to reveal the people, place, time, and purpose of a specific choral ensemble. This present study will also employ ethnographic methods with the purpose of understanding the culture of the Seattle Men’s Chorus in order to gain a glimpse into the complex relationships at the heart of its meaningful musicking, a term referred to throughout this document to describe the holistic process of music making.

### **An Overview of Relevant Literature**

The following literature review will examine the literature and research on community choirs, men’s choruses, and the Gay and Lesbian Chorus Association in order to provide a context to the present study.

**Community choirs.** Since the Seattle Men’s Chorus is open to the community and not affiliated with an academic institution or religious entity, it is considered a community chorus. To give context to the study, the following section will give an overview of recent research, both quantitative and qualitative in nature, concerning community. Over the past 30 years, the community choir has been examined in a variety of ways. Studies have examined choirs of marginalized populations (Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Silber, 2005) and choirs of retired

populations (Bowers, 1998; Darrough, 1990). Other studies have had a more specific focus such as the characteristics and musical background of singers (Aliapoulis, 1970; Darrough, 1990; Holmquist, 1995; Rensink-Hoff, 2009; Tipps, 1992; Vincent, 1997), history and nature of female choruses (Rickwood, 1999; Roma, 1992; Silber, 2005), perception and identity in male choruses (Bailey & Davidson, 2002; Davidson & Faulkner, 2004; Roma, 2010), attitudes of singers concerning conductor behavior (Bell, 2000; Rickwood, 1999), attitudes of singers towards one another (Bowers, 1998), and factors that influenced participation in a community chorus (Buness, 1979).

***Characteristics of community choir singers.*** A comprehensive profile of the average American community choir is not possible from the current research. However, several of the studies looked at the characteristics of singers from different areas of the United States and have confirmed anecdotally that more women than men participate in choruses (Bell, 2000; Darrough, 1990; Tipps, 1992; Vincent, 1997). In Bell's (2000) study of ten New York area community choruses, women outnumbered men. Darrough (1990) examined the participation of older adults (55+) in Arizona retirement choruses and reported that the population was mostly female. Tipps (1992) focused on the participants of choirs in the Southeastern United States and reported that female to male ratio was 2:1; a statistic that was also true in Vincent's (1997) examination of Kentucky community choruses. Bell (2004) said that the issue of gender imbalance in choral participation must be addressed in future research. Perhaps research in the area of men's choruses could help address this concern.

***Men's choruses.*** Most of the research and literature focusing on men's choruses examines the history, literature, and development of college glee clubs (Fisher, 2009; Jones 2008; Marvin, 2012a; Marvin, 2012b; Thomas, 1962). Other singular studies have examined

aspects of unique choral cultures such as self-perception, intra-group relationships, and external connections in a male prison chorus (Roma, 2010); perceptions of participants in a homeless male choir (Bailey & Davidson, 2002); construction of identity, collaboration, and competition in a male choir in Iceland (Davidson & Faulkner, 2004); and perceptions of participation in a Welsh men's choir (Rohwer & Rohwer, 2012). Trame (1993) is one of the few researchers to trace the history of the male chorus back to its Masonic roots in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century.

***GALA choruses.*** In contrast to the waning participation of men in mixed choruses, “large-scale gay men’s choruses emerged in the late 1970s first as a function of community expression and later as a political response to the devastation of AIDS” (Sigman, 2002, pp. 85-86). The Gay and Lesbian Chorus Association (GALA) is the leader of the North American LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual) choral movement. Chorus America has devoted two articles to the history and development of GALA Choruses (Lee, 2013; Sparks, 2005). In the first article, Kenneth Cole, executive director of the GALA organization from 1994 to 2001, described the GALA community: “They [the singers] come [not only] because of the music, of course, and to socialize, but also for the sense of community and friendship” (Sparks, 2005, p. 29). He further added that even though non-GALA choruses come together for community and friendship, “in the gay community, the chorus plays a major community role. There is a very, very strong network within the chorus” (Sparks, 2005, p. 29). Jane Ramseyer Miller, past artistic director-in-residence for the GALA and director of One Voice Mixed Chorus in St. Paul, Minnesota for 19 years, talked about one of the innate qualities of GALA Choruses: “There's a vulnerability when GALA choruses perform and sing, so the audience feels drawn in; they are a part of what's happening on stage rather than just observers” (Lee, 2013, p. 19). Tim Seelig, former director of Turtle Creek Chorale and current director of San Francisco Gay Men’s

Chorus (SFGMC), noted that his music colleagues outside the GALA movement are starting to take note about the movement: “They look at us and ask what LGBT choruses bring to the broader community that they could learn from. I have only one word to describe what that is: engagement” (Lee, 2013, p. 19).

There is a growing body of research encompassing a diversity of issues and perspectives represented in gay and lesbian choruses. Through a descriptive case study, Miller (1996) examined the fundraising activities of the Gay Men’s Chorus of Washington [DC], which possesses one of the top ten operating budgets in GALA. By looking at a 14-year span of efforts, he hoped to determine how the chorus had come to a place where they could produce major concerts with famous guest artists. Data were obtained through focused interviews, documents, and archival materials. Miller discovered that the Capital Club, a financial support group, contributed 30% to the operating budget. In addition, the most consistent fundraiser was the internal sale of used pornography. In conclusion he stated the need for broadening the support of individual supporters.

Mensel (2007) looked at the impact of affinity compositions, pieces that possess a “demonstrable intention to affirm its performers and core audience (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and feminist), reinforce group and individual identity, and educate people outside the intended core (the heterosexual majority) (p. 11).” The connections that these pieces made between chorus members and between chorus and audience seem to be referring to bonding and bridging capital, respectively. The role of repertoire and performance in building social capital will be addressed later in this study. Coyle (2006) examined significant repertory commissioned by gay men’s choruses. Gurlly (2004) examined the concepts of pride and shame in the San Diego Men’s Chorus and Hayes (2008) looked at the educational outreach of the New York City

Ambassador Chorus. Knotts and Gregorio (2011) looked at how the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles confronted homophobia. Also included in the body of research is a music therapist's report on the social and historical perspectives of the SFGMC (Hilliard, 2002) and the various roles music played in the member's lives (Hilliard, 2008).

The research of Latimer (2008) and Henderson and Hodges (2007) both examined the sociological aspects of gay choruses and help to inform this present research. Latimer (2008), the closest in methodology to the present study, examined the demography, sociology, and identity acquisition in the Heartland Men's Chorus. He asked the choral members many of the same questions in his interviews as I did in mine e.g., Why did you join? Why do you stay? However, his questions were aimed toward the way members negotiate sexual identity. In conclusion Latimer said,

Overall findings of this study suggest that future research of GALA choruses, and perhaps of choral organizations at large, could profitably continue to explore the dynamic musical and interpersonal relationships between choristers, their expanding audiences, the music community, and society as a whole. These findings also suggest that various qualitative methodologies might provide vigorous means for such investigations (p. 34).

He also noted a lack of ethnographic research that focuses on community aspects in gay and lesbian choruses, providing further justification for the current study.

Similar to this current study, Henderson and Hodges (2007) inquired into the creation of community and community spirit in a gay chorus in Oklahoma. Through a phenomenological lens, they examined social interactions between members, shared ties between people, and the context of the performances. They came to the conclusion that the chorus met all the requirements of community and predicted that future studies would support these findings. In

addition, they called for further research into the formation of community among marginalized groups for the building the self-esteem of individuals and for the good of society.

Bell (2004) points out that “further research in this area [of gay men’s choruses] may clarify the sociological issues influencing male participation in adult choirs” (p. 50).

Furthermore, Hilliard (2008) calls for more research on gay and lesbian choruses and their impact on the musical and greater community. Aside from being mentioned in the literature as a founding choir of the GALA movement (Coyle, 2006; Gordon, 1990; Gurlly, 2014; Lee, 2013; Mensel, 2007; Miller, 1995; Sparks, 2005), no other mention of Seattle Men’s Chorus is made in the literature. The fact that the SMC has not been studied makes it an ideal environment for building on the work of Bell (2004) and Hilliard (2008) by responding to their calls for more research of GALA Choruses.

### **Need For The Study**

In an effort to understand musicking at the community level, researchers in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century primarily focused on quantifying the past experiences of singers with regard to family support or participation in formal music lessons and school ensembles (Aliapoulis, 1970; Bell, 2004; Darrough, 1990; Holmquist, 1995; Rensink-Hoff, 2009; Tipps, 1992; Vincent, 1997).

While this information has helped to create a profile of the average singer, it is of little use to choruses facing the challenges of shrinking audiences, diversity in membership, gender imbalance in the chorus, and the lack of development of communication systems. There is a need for research that examines the workings of the chorus as a whole. In the conclusion of Bell’s (2004) overview of choral research she agrees, “Community choirs with substantial histories need to write their stories. . . The writing and sharing of the stories and histories of community choirs is important to continuing the tradition of community choral performance” (p. 49). This

study shares the story of the SMC, the largest community chorus in North America and the largest gay men's chorus in the world, in hopes that it can continue to support the tradition of community choral performance.

### **Purpose Statement and Questions**

The purpose of this ethnography was to examine the culture of a highly successful community men's chorus with particular attention to the musical and social interactions of its members in rehearsal and in post-rehearsal gatherings. Regular choir rehearsals, sectionals, concert performances, festival experiences, membership meetings, board meetings, and other events of the SMC were observed, documented, and examined with the following questions in mind:

Primary Question: What is the culture of the Seattle Men's Chorus?

Sub-questions:

1. How does the culture of the Seattle Men's Chorus manifest itself during rehearsals, performances, meetings, and/or other events?
2. How does the Seattle Men's Chorus sustain and share its culture?

### **Definition of Terms**

**Culture.** According to ethnomusicologist Spradley (1980), "Culture is the learned, shared knowledge, that people use to generate behavior and interpret experience. To get at culture, ethnographers must learn the meanings of action and experience from the insider's or informant's point of view." For this purposes of this study and in line with prior research (Bartolome, 2010), culture will be operationally defined as "the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution or organization" ("Culture," n.d.). Bartolome's (2010) ethnography of the Seattle Girls' Choir.

**GALA choruses.** *The Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses* is the leading association supporting the LGBT choral movement and is “dedicated to helping choruses become more effective, both artistically and administratively” (GALA Choruses, n.d.b). The term *GALA* is sometimes used in the community to refer to a gay or lesbian chorus regardless of whether it is officially registered with the official organization.

**Musicking.** A term coined by Small (1998) to reflect his philosophy that music is an action and process (verb) and not an object (noun).

**Social capital.** According to Putnam (1995) “Social capital refers to the features of organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate cooperation and coordination for mutual benefit” (p. 67). There are three types of social capital: bonding, bridging, and linking.

***Bonding social capital.*** Bonding social capital is a form of social capital consisting of horizontal ties within closed networks such as people of the same demographic e.g., family, close friends, neighbors and work colleagues (Stone, 2003; Woolcock, Grootaert, Narayan, Jones, 2004).

***Bridging social capital.*** Bridging social capital is a form of social capital consisting of ties that look outward across different demographics (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock et al., 2004) and fosters “broader identities and reciprocity” (Putnam, 2000, p. 23). It also “involves overlapping networks (in which members of one group can gain access to resources of another group because of overlapping membership.)” (Stone, 2003, p. 1).

***Linking social capital.*** Linking social capital is a type of social capital that emphasizes vertical ties between organizations, institutions and/or people who possess differing degrees of power or influence (Stone 2003; Woolcock et al., 2004).

## **Overview of Chapters**

In constructing this ethnography, all efforts have been made to help the reader enter into the experience of being present in rehearsals, concerts, and events of the Seattle Men's Chorus. Chapter one provides an overview of literature in which to situate this study, including research on community choruses, men's choruses, and the development of the gay and lesbian choral movement. In addition, brief descriptions of ethnographic studies concerning the choral ensemble are included as a reference.

Chapter two will describe the method of this study and provides a historical overview of SMC and Flying House Productions. Chapter two also discusses the content and execution of SMC's overarching mission and vision in its daily activities, events, and concert season. It is in this chapter that the culture (attitudes, values, goals and practices) of the organization will be revealed. An examination of the roles of the artistic team and board will provide the scaffolding necessary to understand the network of relationships that are inherent in the SMC.

Chapter three will examine both the SMC as a "family of choice" by its singing members and the artistic director's role in creating and maintaining this culture. Chapter four will discuss the relationship between this social system of the SMC and social capital as described by Putnam (2000). Chapter five will close this study with implications for further practice, directions for further research, and a postlude on the current research. It is my hope that by seeing an insider's perspective of a successful chorus, other choruses may benefit from their example.

## Chapter II

### Method and Context

This chapter presents the qualitative methods used to examine the culture of the Seattle Men's Chorus (SMC). In the introduction, I address the choice of research method, my role, and the limitations of the application of this research, broadly speaking. The remainder of this chapter explains the boundaries of the study, how data were collected, ethical considerations, analysis and coding, narrative style, validation of the study, and the researcher's role in the study. It concludes with a brief historical overview of the Seattle Men's Chorus to lay the foundation for a discussion of the emergent themes in chapter three.

#### **Ethnographic Research Method**

From my initial outsider's view I surmised that an insider's perspective (Wolcott, 2008) was necessary to understand the full complexity of the SMC culture. In addition, the open-ended nature of my questions necessitated a reflexive research process—one that takes into account the researcher's point of view and the research relationship—that is indicative of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). For these reasons and because I wanted to document a bounded culture in its entirety, an ethnographic design, one of five qualitative approaches to inquiry, was selected for this research. "Ethnography is a design of inquiry coming from anthropology and sociology in which the researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviors, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged time" (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). Ethnographic methods have been used in the field of music (Blacking, 1974; Merriam, 1967; Nettl, 1995) and have influenced the formation of the field of ethnomusicology, "the study of music in its cultural context" (The Society of Ethnomusicology, n.d.). According to the Society of Ethnomusicology, "Ethnomusicologists approach music as a social process in order to understand not only *what*

music is but *why* it is: what music means to its practitioners and audiences, and how those meanings are conveyed” (The Society of Ethnomusicology, n.d.). The field is interdisciplinary in its nature and the resulting research has been utilized in educational settings, museum settings, and policy settings.

The use of ethnographic methods allowed for an intentional research process that remained open to the alternative, emergent approaches, which were based on what I was discovering in the field. While I first planned to observe rehearsals exclusively, I quickly realized the SMC culture was complex and extended beyond the rehearsal walls. I needed to attend all events required of singing members to gain a full picture of the intricacy of the SMC culture. My commitment to and engagement with this group on many levels and in a variety of contexts quickly led to invitations by members to attend unofficial social outings after rehearsals. As indicative of qualitative research, data were collected in the “natural setting” of the chorus. I, the researcher, was the key instrument in collecting the multiple sources of data. Throughout the whole study, I focused on the meanings of all events in light of the participants’ meanings. Through this document, I have sought to share a holistic account of the culture of the Seattle Men’s Chorus through a multiplicity of perspectives, reflective of standard research practices (Creswell, 2013).

The remainder of this chapter explains the boundaries of the study, how data were collected, ethical considerations, analysis and coding, narrative style, validation of the study and the researcher’s role in the study. To lay the foundation for a discussion of the emergent themes in chapter three, the current chapter concludes with a historical overview of the Seattle Men’s Chorus to lay the foundation for a discussion of the emergent themes in chapter three.

## **Bounding the Study**

**Subject and location.** This ethnographic study explores the culture of the Seattle Men's Chorus (SMC), the largest community chorus in North America and the largest gay men's chorus in the world at more than 350 members (Flying House Productions, n.d.a). The chorus rehearses every Monday night, from 6:30 to 9:30 pm at the Plymouth Congregational Church in downtown Seattle; this location served as the primary research site. The membership of the chorus is diverse in age, race, and socio-economic make-up. To audition, men must be at least 18 years of age. I am aware of members who are 18 years old and 82+ years old. There is one founding member still singing in the chorus. According to the company manager, information regarding the average length of membership is not currently being monitored or tabulated. At the time of data collection, membership dues were not required. However, men were responsible to purchase their own performance attire. During the observation period, the chorus was rehearsing the following concert productions: *Falling in Love Again* (April 2011), *Heartthrobs* (June 2011), *Cool Yule: The Big Band Theory* (Holiday 2011), *Come Together: Music of the Beatles* (March 2012), *Sing Out* (June 2012), *GALA Festival* (July 2012), *Baby, It's Cold Outside* (Holiday 2012); *Dancing Queen: the Music of ABBA* (April 2013), and *Hairspray* (June 2013).

Other research sites included rehearsal and performance spaces at McCaw Hall and Benaroya Hall in Seattle, Washington; the Broadway Performance Hall in Bellingham, Washington; the Pantages Theater in Tacoma, Washington; the annual retreat at the Silverdale Beach Hotel in Silverdale, Washington; the Convention Center and Performance Spaces of the GALA Festival in Denver, Colorado; and various restaurants and social venues in each town.

**Data Collection.** Data collection involved the three pillars of ethnography: observation, interview, and analysis of the material culture (an anthropological term referring to the physical

evidence of a specific culture-bearing group). Multiple forms of data were collected during the 2011-2013 seasons of the Seattle Men's Chorus—over a period of 31 months—in multiple locations.

**Observations.** I observed over 180 hours of weekly rehearsals and extra Saturday rehearsals and twenty-four hours of production week rehearsals. I attended thirteen concerts, two run-out concerts, and one children's concert. In addition, I attended every show at least twice: first, from backstage to observe the culture of the show and second, from the hall to observe audience engagement. To learn about the organization culture, I attended one board meeting, one annual meeting, and one SMC chat meeting that is akin to a chorus town hall meeting. To learn about the process of becoming a new member, I attended a welcome party held at the artistic director's home. Like many of the formal and informal social events I attended, this party helped me gain an insider's perspective on the culture of the chorus.

I also attempted to gain an insider's perspective by attending two three-day retreats in Silverdale, Washington. Through the financial help of the GALA liaison and the GALA organization, I also attended the quadrennial GALA Festival held in Denver, Colorado as the designated researcher of the SMC. At the GALA Festival, I also participated as a singer with the Seattle Women's Chorus (a part of Flying House Productions), so as to gain even more of an insider's view from the performance stage. In addition, I was present at three Seattle Pride Festivals as part of the Flying House Organization and volunteered at the information table.

**Fieldnotes.** Jottings and fieldnotes were gathered as an observant and as a participant. At times, I would be invited to sit in a section or would fill an empty seat and sing to gain a more accurate picture of chorus participation. There was a considerable exchange of ideas in the carpool of the researcher with chorus members. I gathered data from over 24 hours of informal

conversations during the carpool and post-rehearsal social gatherings. Informal exchanges regarding the chorus were also conducted via text message and Facebook. In addition, the researcher attended the post-rehearsal social functions at a local bistro as well as special events such as birthday and pride celebrations. The researcher kept a journal during the study that collected observations, ideas about emerging themes, and musings regarding interaction of self within the research environment.

***Interviews.*** In order to gain perspective on the chronological timeline of the 30-year ensemble, I conducted interviews with the artistic director, assistant artistic director, accompanist, sign language interpreter, executive director, marketing director, chorus manager, president of the board, two volunteers, and twenty singing members from a diverse age range and tenure with the SMC. Since SMC is a part of the GALA Choruses organization and in order to gain a broader GALA perspective, a GALA Chorus director who was a close colleague of the SMC artistic director was also interviewed to gain a broader GALA perspective.

During one rehearsal, I was given time to describe my study and the opportunity to solicit members to be interviewed. In addition, a follow-up announcement was placed in the chorus electronic mailing list. Chorus members were selected for interviews through volunteer sampling, convenience sampling, opportunistic sampling, and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013); snowball sampling asks interviewees to suggest other interviewees who may be helpful to the study. Additional participants were asked for interviews due to their high involvement with the chorus, their identity as known culture-bearers, or their length of participation in the life of the chorus. A second request for interviews or reflections from the members was placed after the GALA Festival. I found the members of the SMC very eager to share their stories as indicated by the 30+ people who signed up to be interviewed after my initial announcement of the study. In

addition, chorus members would seek me out in person and by email hoping that they had not missed the opportunity to share their experiences with the chorus.

These one-on-one interviews took place in a setting of the participant's choosing and usually occurred in coffee shops or homes. All but one participant chose to meet in person rather than be interviewed by phone. The interviews were semi-structured and guided by a constructed interview guide (see Appendix A) in line with research protocol (Weiss, 1995), but were open to where the participant led the conversation. The participant was free to refuse to answer any of the questions. Interviews were recorded through the audio note function in Microsoft Word on a laptop and iPhone memo application. I was only asked once to turn off the recording device. The interviews ranged in length from 38 to 135 minutes, with an average length of 50 minutes. Participants were also informally interviewed during social times and after rehearsals regarding instances that occurred in rehearsal or current issues trending on the electronic mailing list. I collected data from interviews until I had reached saturation of the data (no new or relevant information was emerging), an idea that comes from grounded theory (Creswell, 2013). The approximately 30 hours of interviews were transcribed verbatim resulting in 1,150 pages of transcripts. These transcripts were compared to the original recordings and checked for accuracy.

***Material Culture.*** Data were also collected from materials such as concert video recordings, newsletters, and promotional materials in both paper and electronic form. Additional historical background data were retrieved from the special collections archive at the University of Washington Libraries in Seattle.

### **Narrative**

In the tradition of Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), this ethnography will present a detailed portrait of the culture of the SMC through a “thematic narrative” that is fieldnote-

centered. Passages from fieldnotes have been excerpted and embedded into the overall narrative providing a sense of place at the event. Observations will be presented via a “thick description” approach (Geertz, 1973) that will help to illuminate the context and meaning of the specific point in time. This is necessary before an ethnographer can understand and interpret the behavior, language, and artifacts (Creswell, 2013). Analytical commentary follows each passage to help discuss patterns and discrepancies in the emerging theme. When possible, I have chosen to use the participant’s own words through extended embedded quotes to describe an event or situation.

### **Analysis and Coding**

Since ethnographic research is reiterative, I started analyzing the data before data collection was complete, and repeatedly went back to reexamine it in light of emerging themes. The raw data were re-read and organized chronologically in notebooks and computer folders. All handwritten notes or journals were typed into the computer application *Microsoft Word* to facilitate coding. The interview transcripts were uploaded into *HyperRESEARCH* ([www.researchware.com](http://www.researchware.com)), a qualitative computer software program from the Internet that “enables you to code and retrieve, build theories, and conduct analyses of your data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 204).

The data were coded via open and focused coding and then were analyzed inductively for emerging themes and patterns. First, open coding of fieldnotes, journals, and interviews was first employed and resulted in 400 codes such as, “fun,” “healing,” “collaboration,” “community,” and “belonging.” During open coding, codes were gradually grouped into 31 categories according to similarity or function, such as characteristics of the community, reasons for joining, and chorus connections. Attention was especially given to the phrases or words that the

participants routinely used themselves, such as “family” and “church.” During open coding, I reflected on the emerging codes through memos made in the computer application *Evernote*.

Second, these categories were inductively analyzed for patterns and led to broad descriptive themes such as the relationship between chorus members, enigmatic and charismatic leadership of conductor, and the palpable connection between performer and audience. As these themes emerged, they became the focal point for focused coding. From these themes, descriptions began to form concerning the culture of the chorus and connections between codes began to emerge.

### **Ethical Considerations and Naming**

The University of Washington International Review Board approved this study for exemption status under 45 CFR 46.101 (b) (2) from all 45 CFR requirements. The determination period is from June 30, 2011 to June 29, 2016 and all research guidelines have been followed. The SMC artistic director granted permission via email to conduct this ethnographic study, attend rehearsals and performances, and interview members of the organization. All interviewees were informed of the purpose of this research and signed an informed consent form (see Appendix B). Verbatim quotations were made available to the participants for verification of intent. The names of the participants have been changed to pseudonyms to protect their identity. In the same vein as Bartolome’s research (2010), the name of the chorus and staff has remained unchanged—with permission—so that this body of research can aid the chorus’s mission and vision.

### **Validation and Application**

Qualitative researchers are calling for a reconceptualization of validity in relation to postmodern philosophy. According to Lather (1991), a social science report should be an open

narrative that acknowledges situatedness (involvement within a particular context), partiality, and questions. Validation strategies employed in this research study were prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation among data sources, peer review, clarification of researcher bias, member-checking; rich, thick description in the narrative; and participatory modes of research. It is my hope that my research has “generative promise” (Creswell, 2013, p. 248), raises new questions, and spurs further dialogue into the culture of a successful community chorus. The rich, thick description also provides an opportunity for readers to transfer information to settings and to determine for themselves whether the findings can be applied “because of shared characteristics” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252).

While the findings of ethnographic research are not generalizable across the field, the findings of this research may inform the methods of other ethnographic studies, help support current theories regarding community choirs, and lead to further research both qualitative and quantitative in design. Choruses with similar personnel and/or mission and vision statements may find this research useful in strengthening the culture of their choruses. In addition, community choruses in general may find the proposed social capital model for community choruses in chapter five useful in assessing their health and sustainability.

### **The Researcher’s Role**

In qualitative research, the researcher is central to the collection of data (Creswell, 2013) and therefore it is necessary for the researcher to identify biases, values, and personal background. At first, I was wary that my identity as a straight female would be a prohibitive factor in gaining the trust and stories of the SMC members. However, I found the opposite to be true. During many interviews, the men felt comfortable relating highly personal and emotional stories. In addition, since I had spent such a great amount of time with them in a variety of

contexts outside the rehearsal, they felt at ease relating off-color jokes or comments that they would not normally share with a woman.

While I lived in Seattle since 1994, my interaction with the Seattle Men's Chorus was minimal until this study. The only occasion in which I had seen them perform was a collaborative performance in March 2000 with the Northwest Girlchoir and Vancouver-based women's choir, Elektra. The concert, which was held in Benaroya Hall—home of the Seattle Symphony, was part of a Northwest American Choral Directors Association Conference. The SMC gave a beautiful multimedia performance of *Song of Wisdom* based on the storybook, *Old Turtle*. Following that work, I recall that they gave a very entertaining performance of Alan Menken's *Under the Sea* from Disney's *The Little Mermaid* complete with sea creatures bathed in black lights to create the sense of an underwater menagerie.

My first direct interaction with the Seattle Men's Chorus was as a researcher at a rehearsal observation in December 2010. I had just assumed the role of conductor for a large women's chorus and was looking to observe how one effectively leads a large ensemble. My colleagues, who were newly hired SMC vocal coaches, suggested that I observe the chorus. From that first rehearsal observation, I knew that something was “special” about the chorus and had a desire to learn more. What began as a casual rehearsal observation became a 31-month in-depth exploration into the culture of the SMC.

During rehearsals, my role varied from nonparticipant to participant. I usually sat at the back of the rehearsal hall with a notebook or computer taking notes. Members would come up and talk to me during rehearsals and breaks. If I had been absent for a couple of weeks, they would notice and inquire as to my wellbeing. However, I soon became frustrated with seeing only the backs of the singers' heads. This frustration occasionally led me to walk up and down

the aisles of rehearsal to gain a differing perspective. In addition, I would occasionally sit among the men and sing quietly to get a feel for the personality of the section. The presence of a female voice in the men's chorus was unusual and typically only reserved for guest artists who sang solos with the chorus. However, the men did not mind my singing and welcomed my participation in rehearsal. Upon one occasion, one tenor remarked how my vocal presence helped him to learn his part. Some members asked for assistance in locating where we were in the music. Several times I was asked if I was going to sing in the concert.

In order to get to know the full extent of the culture of the chorus, I volunteered to assist with the raffle ticket fundraiser at concerts. This task helped me to break the ice and get to know both audience and singing members. Occasionally, I would help the chorus manager take attendance, take payments, or file papers. As the pianist's page-turner for Jake Heggie's *For a Look or a Touch*, I was able to view the culture of the chorus from yet another distinctive vantage point. During these performances, I sat in the "pit" of McCaw Hall (Opera House) and could see first-hand the connection between the conductor, instrumentalists, actors, and chorus.

While I have had previous occasions to interact with collegiate men's choruses and boys' choruses, this study was my first interaction with a chorus affiliated with the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA). Even though I was never formally hired to be a vocal coach for the Seattle Men's Chorus, there were times when I was invited to be a part of discussions concerning the vocal needs of the chorus. This led some of the chorus members to perceive that I was a formally hired coach for the men and/or women's choruses.

While the Seattle Women's Chorus was not the subject of this research study, my involvement with this chorus should be discussed as it helped me make the transition from nonparticipant to participant within Flying House Productions, the umbrella organization that

oversees both choruses. Through my research of the Seattle Men's Chorus, I was offered the opportunity to be a guest conductor on the Seattle Women's Chorus' March 2013 concert in St. Mark's Cathedral. (All of this work was done as a volunteer and I was not compensated monetarily for the experience.) Since I was going to the GALA Festival in Denver to observe the men's chorus, I chose to obtain an insider's view of the Flying House Productions organization by also singing with the SWC. Performances included collaborations with the New York City Gay Men's Chorus and the SFGMC, both of which are included in the literature review. This work has led me to be asked to serve on the women's chorus's Performance Excellence Committee. In January 2014, I returned to Seattle to lead a vocal workshop during their retreat.

**Inside view as “wife.”** An ethnographer may be an insider or outsider to the culture being studied. In this present study, my examination started from an outsider's point of view but I was quickly adopted by the group as an insider due to the open access granted by the artistic director and my unique introduction to the ensemble. My formal introduction, the story of which follows, surprisingly broke down many potential barriers to my acceptance by the chorus and accelerated my induction into the “SMC Family”:

The first day that I attended a rehearsal of the SMC, I had carpooled with the tenor vocal coach, the baritone vocal coach, and a member of the chorus named Mike. The artistic director had given me permission to observe the rehearsal but that did nothing to quell my fears about how I would be accepted as a woman among a large group of men and a researcher in a group that may not want a stranger prying into their lives. I shared my fears with one of the vocal coaches, a friend, who said that no one would be paying attention to me. Little did I know that that first rehearsal would set the tone for the next 4

years and would prove to be a microcosm of my whole time with the Seattle Men's Chorus.

Mike was especially excited for me to observe the SMC, a chorus that he had been a part of for many years and whose mission he especially supported. He introduced me to Tim, the chorus manager, and asked that I be customarily introduced. I waited as Tim ran through his list of announcements to the chorus knowing that very soon many eyes would be upon me. To my shock and surprise, I was introduced and welcomed as the baritone voice coach's wife, much to the amusement of Mike who had instituted the practical joke. Due to the welcoming atmosphere, many chorus members introduced themselves very earnestly to my "husband" and me. Several weeks later, it was announced that Mr. Smith and I had divorced and that he was "back on the market." Much to my amusement, many people felt genuinely sorry for my situation. To this day, I am still referred to lovingly by SMC members as *Mrs. Smith* and asked the whereabouts of my "husband."

This sense of humor, close fellowship, and acceptance as family would later be revealed as norms. However, moments after the introduction questions began to surface in my mind: Why do the SMC members welcome and embrace a woman in their midst? Was it the fact that I was the wife of one of their leaders and that is what you do with family? From then on, I was never in want for a chair, music, or even directions to a rehearsal. I was looked after like a member of the family. After five months into my research, the chorus manager offered me the designation "Associate Member" to facilitate my access to venues, which I accepted. In addition to the photo identification badge signifying that I was officially a part of the organization, it allowed access backstage to the performing halls where security was highly monitored.

## Site and Context: The Seattle Men's Chorus

The following historical background of the SMC provides context to the current study. It will highlight the importance of the GALA Chorus movement in the founding and development of the chorus. This historical background will also emphasize the importance of the following “firsts” to the development of the organization that exists today: coveted performing venues, new commissions, awards and collaborations, recordings, high-profile guest artists, and quality media coverage. Finally, I will discuss the significance of the following as a backdrop to the culture of the SMC: the mission and vision, the artistic leadership team, the change of organizational name, the roles of the board and volunteers, and the outreach program. All of these discussions are foundational to understanding the emergent themes of family in chapter 3 and the application of social capital theory to the culture of SMC, as presented in chapter 4.

**Historical background.** The start of the gay choral movement can be traced back to 1978. The SFGMC had been established that year and was the first chorus to have “gay” in the name. On November 27, 1978, Harvey Milk, the first openly gay district supervisor, was assassinated along with Mayor George Mascone on the steps of City Hall in San Francisco. The SFGMC, who had been rehearsing that night, marched to city hall and sang on the steps in memory of the fallen leaders (Hilliard, 2002) for what became, for all intents and purposes, the inaugural appearance of the nation's first gay men's chorus. In the spring of 1981, the SFGMC embarked on a national tour to 12 cities including New York, Boston, Washington, D.C., Lincoln, Detroit, Minneapolis, Dallas, and Seattle (Hilliard, 2002).

Gordon (1990) reported what one critic from the *Boston Globe* wrote: “Many more famous musical organizations could learn a thing or two from this chorus. Their program varied and was performed with unwavering enthusiasm. The audience *expected* to have a good time at a

concert of musical substance, which is unusual, and that is what it got, which is more unusual still” (p. 25). Gordon (1990) also reported that Campbell of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* wrote, “This chorus is exceptionally good. Choral groups of this caliber, regardless of their religious beliefs, ethnic background or sexual preference are a rarity. . .it is supremely well trained and more professional than amateur in music ability and choral technique” (p. 25). It is this chorus and their expertise that inspired a small group of men from a church in Seattle to travel down to San Francisco in search of advice for establishing their own chorus. New choruses were formed shortly afterwards in the cities where SFGMC toured. In 1981, representatives from 12 gay and lesbian choruses met in Chicago to discuss mutual issues concerning their choruses. Out of that meeting the GALA Performing Arts organization was tentatively formed (GALA Choruses, n.d.a).

In 1982, fourteen gay and lesbian choruses met in San Francisco during the Gay Games for the First West Coast Choral Festival. This festival led to the formation of the GALA Choruses Network. In 1983, the name was changed to GALA Choruses: Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA) and a 501(c)(3) status was obtained. According to their website, their current mission statement reads, “We are dedicated to helping choruses become more effective, both artistically and administratively.” It is the leading association supporting the LGBT choral movement. Today there are 180 choruses in their membership spanning North America, Europe, South America, Africa, and Australia. Every four years the organization sponsors a choral festival featuring 130 choruses with over 5,000 participants from around the world (GALA Choruses, n.d.b).

Much of the historical data that follows are from columns that Paul Nelson, bass, put together to help new members become acquainted with the history. They were published in the

*Chorus Quarterly*, a former publication of the Seattle Men's Chorus and are now part of the chorus website. Where the source differs, I have made a note. While this history is not comprehensive, it highlights monumental events and "firsts" in the life of the chorus and therefore has impacted its culture. The beginnings of the Seattle Men's Chorus can be traced back to 1979. Several members of Seattle's Gay Grace Gospel Chapel (GGC) trekked down to San Francisco. They had heard of the SFGMC and were inspired to start a chorus in Seattle. GGC organist, C. David George corresponded with Jay Davidson, SFGMC manager on the logistics of such an endeavor. Dick Kramer, conductor of the SFGMC flew to Seattle and met with David to help lay down the groundwork for the SMC. This self-made organizing committee found a conductor, Richard Dollarhide, who also had a connection with Seattle First United Methodist Church and obtained it as a rehearsal space. During the summer, ads were placed in placed in the *Seattle Gay News* and the *Dorian Newsletter* about the first rehearsal on Sunday, September 9, 1979:

SOON: A SEATTLE MEN'S CHORUS! The Seattle Men's Chorus brings together individuals of contemporary lifestyles whose interests lie in the promotion of music within our community...The Chorus is developing a varied repertoire of both classical and popular music to perform in concert throughout greater Seattle. In addition, the chorus has long-range plans to record, to tour, and other exciting possibilities. The first rehearsal will be Monday, September 10... (Flying House Productions, n.d.b)

Mike Hathaway (1988), still an active member of the chorus, had this to say about the formation of the chorus in one of the *Chorus Quarterly* newsletters, "Not in my wildest dreams would I have believed that joining a singing group of twenty-two gay men in 1979 would lead to the holiday extravaganza in Meany Hall last December. I attended the first rehearsal with much

skepticism for the success of this tiny group and for myself. I was not a singer, just a saxophonist. I only read music in the treble clef, and I thought vibrato was an Italian hairdresser, but we were all there for one purpose—to sing like the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus.”

According to Paul Nelson, there were struggles in that first season to learn notes as many had little to no musical training. Nelson (2004a) recalled,

I was in the audience for that June 1980 show, in the auditorium at the Museum of History and Industry. I remember that there was a folk dance group meeting in rooms above the auditorium, and until they finished at 9 there were occasional loud thumps overhead. The Chorus sang *It's a Grand Night For Singing*, and when the verses came around about stars and moon, a few guys on the back row of the risers held up stars and a moon on sticks and waved them (p. 34).

During the next year, there came a big upset in the leadership of the chorus. After a show, there was a power struggle between Dollarhide and the SMC and he subsequently left the organization. Edward M. Pounds, a bass singer in the chorus, took over the conducting reins for the Fall 1980 concert. Pounds became “discontented” and withdrew from rehearsals in 1981. According to Hathaway (1988), “Ed was our conductor for about a year and then returned to Chicago but sitting in the front-row second tenor section was a good looking Baptist guy ‘who shouldn’t be there.’ Dennis Coleman became our conductor” (p. 2). That second tenor and music minister at a local Baptist church, Dennis Coleman and Chet Forward, a former junior college choir director, stepped up into leadership. They prepared the June 1981 concert by splitting the conducting duties. Soon thereafter, Coleman was dismissed from his church position (for his associations with the SMC) and accepted the SMC’s offer to become the official director for the sum of \$200 per month. After the June concert, the SFGMC came to town on their historical

national tour. Nelson (2004a) noted:

We did not assist significantly in that appearance, nor house them (they stayed in a hotel). The Opera House was only about half full, but the show was electrifying. I had goose bumps about half of the whole evening. I have a recording they made of the tour repertoire, and it's still quite good" (p. 35).

That summer, there was a hard push for recruitment and the chorus grew from 65 to 130 members.

SMC became active on the national scene in 1982. During Labor Day weekend in San Francisco, they sang at the West COAST (Come Out And Sing Together) Festival in conjunction with the first Gay Games. Twelve hundred singers from twelve choruses performed for one another (Nelson, 2004 n.d.d). As reported in a November newsletter of the Seattle Men's Chorus (Farrell, 1982), Philip Campbell of the *Bay Area Reporter* wrote, "Highly professional performance and musicianship marked the Seattle Men's Chorus (director—Dennis Coleman) and the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles led by Jerry Carlson. Big sound and lush sonority are the strength of both groups with a special kudos to Seattle for their flair with 'pop' music and flawless timing."

In 1983, SMC made its East Coast debut at the first GALA Festival held at Lincoln Center. According to Nelson (2004b), "Among the highlights of the New York concerts was when the late Tom Mann announced to the New York audience on September 10 that Seattle Men's Chorus was founded just 4 years (to the day) earlier, and the audience then spontaneously sang *Happy Birthday* to us!" (p. 38). This performance had a great impact on the start of the season. Nelson (2000b) wrote, "Our self-confidence as we entered this season was supercharged by our performance at GALA" (p. 36). Nelson (2004a) also reported a paragraph from the

*Washington Post*, describing the experience of that first GALA Festival concert experience:

Seattle Men's Chorus was the most purely musical of the three groups, singing more advanced repertoire with beautifully blended tone, exquisitely precise diction and subtly calculated dynamic nuances. And at the end, when each conductor in turn took the massed voices of all three choruses for a single number, the Seattle music director, Dennis Coleman, made the nearly 300 voices under his direction sound like the Seattle chorus (p. 36).

While the season started on a high note, it ended with the death of Tom Davies, the first of the chorus to succumb to HIV/AIDS. Nelson (2004b) asserted, “Despite the short notice and challenging 4:30 [pm] Tuesday time, about 70 of us showed up [to Davies’ funeral], including a large number of former members who were moved to come and sing, which I thought said a lot about us” (p. 37). In the years that followed, SMC lost over 130 members to AIDS (Nelson, 2004b).

Many components of this successful organization took shape during these early years. While the following overview is not comprehensive, it highlights many of SMC’s firsts including: majoring performing venues, guest artists, choral commissions, initial media exposure, major awards, community collaborations, and recordings that were milestones in the life of the organization.

***Performing venues.*** SMC would soon perform in many beautiful and coveted venues including the following: Carnegie Hall in New York City, Symphony Hall in Boston, Meyerson Symphony Hall in Dallas, Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco, Westminster Hall in London, *Concertgebouw* in Amsterdam, and the *Palau de la Música Catalana* in Barcelona. . These tours brought the ensemble together as a community even during preparation. Major

fundraising had to occur for the Carnegie Hall premiere as part of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Stonewall Riots and the philosophy was that none should be left behind. Coleman (“SMC to make its,” 1994) said, “The chorus has always seen itself as a family, and when a family travels they just don’t leave anyone behind! This week in New York will be one of the most emotionally and culturally important times in the history of our community, and we are committed to being a part of it” (p. 18).

Coleman said that one of the major components of the chorus’s success was its musical home in one of the premiere music halls in Seattle, namely Benaroya Hall, home to the Seattle Symphony (Atkins, 2013). When the Seattle Symphony decided it needed a home of its own separate from the Seattle Opera, Coleman made sure he was present to help design the new hall and to make sure that SMC was one of its major ensembles (Atkins, 2013). (After the symphony, the SMC holds the most performances in the hall.) Before SMC’s season even started, it celebrated its new home with a two-day gala celebration that coincided with its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary season (Coleman, 1998).

***Guest artists.*** While the SMC has its share of pop song repertoire, it also features full-length concerts of classical repertoire made all the more meaningful by the presence of the composers themselves (see Appendix C for a list of collaborations with guest artists). In March 1984, composer Ned Rorem joined them for a performance of one of his works. His appearance was the first of many guest artists in what was to become of one of SMC’s trademarks and components of success according Coleman (Aronson, 1989). Guest stars have included Marni Nixon, Diane Schuur, Harvey Fierstein, Natalie Cole, Bobby McFerrin, Dr. Maya Angelou, Nell Carter, Rosemary Clooney, and Kristin Chenoweth. During my observation, Megan Hilty and Leslie Jordan were guest artists during a holiday and spring show respectively. While the

audience is drawn in by their star power, I have observed first hand the connection that these “stars” have made backstage with the men of the chorus. In addition Nelson (2004c) elaborated, “One of the reasons we engage guest artists is that we outreach to their audience, and they outreach to ours. We got great publicity, all the shows were sold out, and it was the beginning of a very long relationship for us (and many other gay choruses) with ‘Deedles.’ [Diane Schuur]” (p. 35).

**Commissions.** The year 1985 brought partnerships with the greater Seattle community in new ways. A project two years in the making, Coleman commissioned a work by composer Gian Carlo Menotti for the SMC. The next challenge was meeting the promised \$15,000 fee for the work named, *My Christmas*. The SMC family rallied, two members guaranteed the advance, and a donor was found in Dr. Scott Strickland, a former chorus member living in the Midwest. The SMC also received a major grant from the King County Arts Commission PERFORMA '87 New Works Festival. Other community organizations, such as the Seattle Sheraton and Trans World Airline, provided housing and travel. The show was also significant in that it marked the beginning of a 6-year run on television station KTZZ and set the stage for two Public Television (PBS) videos that won Emmys. The latter garnered much publicity and a resulting audience of 150,000 (Nelson, 2004a). SMC would go on to commission other works by composers such as Alice Parker, John Corigliano, David Diamond, Conrad Susa, Robert Moran, James Skofield, David Conte, Samuel Adler, David Maddux, William Hawley, and Eric Lane Barnes (see Appendix D for a list of major commissions and premiers).

Corigliano's *Of Rage and Remembrance*, commissioned by the chorus in 1991, went on to earn a Grammy for Classical Album of the Year in 1997. This work was very significant for the chorus community in that it was the first major musical work to address the AIDS epidemic.

Coleman (“Of Rage,” 1991) recalled, “I sat with John in his apartment for two hours while he played and sang through the piece. The impact of that first hearing moved me to tears. I knew immediately that we had a piece that would have a great impact on the audience and that we would be proud to perform” (p. 6).

**Media exposure.** In my interviews with chorus members, many of them shared that the exposure on television helped for the SMC’s name to become known in the greater Pacific Northwest. Their 1990 show, *Radio Craze*, was telecast on KCTS-9, the Northwest’s public television station. Twenty chorus members helped to host the telethon phone banks. “We were nervous,” recounted chorus member Dan McDevitt (“Radio Craze,” 1990), “We were staffing the phones along with twenty people from the Honeywell Corporation whom we’d never met. How are they going to react? Will anyone watch the show? What if we get no calls?” (p. 1). The night was a phenomenal success as it generated the most pledges during the annual fundraising telethon and the second highest ratings of any local produced show. One out of every six television sets in Western Washington State and British Columbia tuned in to the show (“Radio Craze,” 1990). “It was the most exciting and affirming experience I’ve ever had with the Chorus,” said Dan, a chorus member. “Many of the calls were from Canada or from rural parts of the state—people who had never seen us before. There were hundreds of comments like ‘This is the best how I’ve seen in years!’ or ‘You guys are just terrific, how can I get tickets to your next show?’” SMC would continue to make inroads via the media. In 1996, years before live streaming became ubiquitous, Seattle-based national company Progressive Networks (now RealNetworks, creator of RealAudio) asked permission to broadcast the holiday concert live through the Internet. An estimated 1,000 terminals logged in to see the first ever gay men’s chorus to broadcast live over the Internet.

***Awards and collaborations.*** As the chorus gained exposure, it also began to receive national awards. In July 1988, it was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant. Through it all however, it has remained a strong collaborator in the Seattle performing arts scene, joining forces with the Total Gospel Experience Choir conducted by Pat Wright, the Northwest Girlchoir conducted by Rebecca Rottsolk, and Elektra conducted by Morna Edmundson and the late Diane Loomer (see Appendix E for a list of GALA Chorus collaborations). During the observation period, the Esoterics (choir), KidStage (musical theater group), and Spectrum Dance troupe joined for a combined concert. Coleman’s friend and colleague, Tim Seelig, artistic director of the SFGMC, shared this story: “When I first started at the Turtle Creek Chorale, Dennis had been in Seattle a few years, and I called him and said, ‘Hi Dennis, what do I do?’ . . .He said ‘Collaborate with everybody’” (personal interview, March 26, 2012).

The SMC has been instrumental in promoting the choral art across the nation. In 1990, it hosted a regional convention of Chorus America, which was also the same year that the first full-time staff was hired to support the organization. In 1995, it joined with the Seattle Symphony to co-host the national conference of Chorus America. Coleman also served on the national board of Chorus America for seven years (Flying House Productions, n.d.b).

***Recordings.*** The SMC recorded its first album in 1990 (see Appendix F for list of SMC Recordings). Some singing members used these recordings to come out of the closet to their families and friends. At the chorus’ tenth anniversary, the chorus had reached 200 members and had just hired full-time staff. In the midst of all this growth, however, the chorus stayed true to their mission. Chorus member, John Carroll (1990) wrote, “However, change and growth cannot be measured in just raw statistics. When you get past the balance sheet and the bottom line, when you focus on the heart instead of the hard numbers, you come to realize that things look different

but our hearts haven't changed. . . .SMC is here to touch your heart, to challenge your mind and to stimulate your pride" (p. 8).

**Mission and vision.** Central to the foundation of the Seattle Men's Chorus has been this mission and vision. Chorus member, Ryan stated, "I think there's no way to separate the success of this chorus from the times that we've lived in. It's a happy accident of history...that the chorus' mission resonated so strongly during these years." The central components of the mission and vision have remained the same over the years. Coleman (1993) wrote, "I am proud to be the Director of the Seattle Men's Chorus, in part, because we are more than a musical organization. The Chorus has clearly defined its vision to include artistic, political, and sociological goals. The 'mission' of the Chorus has developed over the years and guides us as we plan our repertoire, concerts, guest artists, and community performances" (p. 3).

Through all the revisions of the mission/vision, the concept of "family" has remained central. In the first issue of the *Chorus Quarterly* (1997) the Statement of Purpose read:

The Seattle Men's Chorus is proud to be a part of Seattle's multifaceted musical community. Though our members are of diverse backgrounds, professions, and interests, we are in many ways a family, united in the pride we take in our singing and our being gay men. As we sing, we hope that our audiences can also share in the unity and joy expressed through the common language of music (p. 1).

In the Fall 1999 issue of the *Chorus Quarterly*, the mission and vision were articulated separately:

#### OUR VISION

The Seattle Men's Chorus is a family partnership of gay men and supporters who use the power of music to create a world that accepts and values its gay and lesbian citizens.

## OUR MISSION

Seattle Men's Chorus presents dynamic choral performances in order to touch as many lives as possible with a celebration of human diversity and individual worth, fostering a caring chorus family (p. 1).

In the Fall 2000 issue of the *Chorus Quarterly*, the mission and vision were refined to the version that is now used today in publications ("Mission and Vision", 2000; Flying House Productions, n.d.c).

## OUR VISION

A world that accepts and values our gay and lesbian citizens.

## OUR MISSION

Seattle Men's Chorus entertains, enlightens, unifies, and heals our audience and members, using the power of words and music to recognize the value of gay and straight people and their relationships.

**Artistic leadership.** Dennis Coleman is the third and current artistic director of the Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus, a position he has held since 1981. Coleman is also the founding and current director of the Seattle Women's Chorus. In addition, he concurrently has been the director of First Congregational Church of Bellevue. He attended the University of Washington from 1966 to 1971 earning a Bachelors of Music in Music Education, a Bachelor of Arts in Performance (harpsichord and voice), and a Masters degree in opera production. Coleman served on the Chorus America board for 6 years and is active as a clinician and guest conductor around the world. In the *Chorus Quarterly* (2000), Coleman talked about the chorus's success:

Why has SMC become the largest gay men's chorus in the world and the most successful community chorus of any type in the United States? Great singers, wise board of directors, hard-working staffs and loyal, supportive audiences [see Appendix G for audience demographics] are part of the answer. Another big reason is the fact that I've had the same brilliant artistic staff to work with for many years. Between us, pianist Evan Stults, ASL interpreter Kevin Gallagher and I have a combined history of 52 years of working with SMC. When we stand on stage together there is a palpable sense of connection that flows between us that creates music and inspires the singers and audience alike. With the addition of Eric Lane Barnes as Assistant Artistic Director this year, the team has grown even stronger (p. 3).

Currently, Eric Lane Barnes is the associate artistic director to the Seattle Men's Chorus, a position he has held since 2000. Barnes helps to direct each SMC show and is also the director of the small comedy/drama/music ensemble Captain Smartyants. Barnes' career is multifaceted as a composer, arranger, scriptwriter, and author. He has composed numerous pieces and scripts for both SMC and Captain Smartyants. His training includes a degree in choral music education from the University of Michigan. He has been commissioned by The Esoterics, The Gay Men's Chorus of Washington DC, The New York City Gay Men's Chorus, One Voice Charlotte, The Quire, Sound Circle, The Turtle Creek Chorale, and The Windy City Gay Chorus.

In Muncie, Indiana, Barnes had the chance to meet Dennis Coleman at a small ensemble festival (personal interview, July 14, 2013). He recalled his first moment meeting the SMC when he was invited to see the 1998 Holiday show,

So I came out to Seattle for the first time, and just in the afternoon I spent between the airport and Benaroya Hall, I just fell in love with the city. And it was like, "Oh, my God.

I love this place. This is so beautiful.” And then I went to Benaroya Hall. I think it was only the second year in its existence. . .It was new. . .And I went through the back, through the back stage, right as the men were warming up on stage, and I walked out and I saw just the beauty of Benaroya Hall, before anybody was in the hall. . .The men were all warming up, and so I came around the corner and Dennis saw me and said, “Guys, this is Eric Lane Barnes.” And they all stopped, turned and, like, applauded, you know, 200 guys. And then I saw the concert and I was blown away.

Evan Stults has been the principal accompanist of the Seattle Men’s Chorus since 1986. Stults moved to Seattle and joined the chorus first as a singer in 1984. When the accompanist left two years later, Stults volunteered to fill the position until about 1989 when he became a part of the paid staff. He recalled, “My best friends were in the chorus, so it was just a new way for me to contribute. . .I felt like I had more to contribute as a pianist than as a singer, and I wanted to contribute” (personal interview, July 12, 2013). He has traveled around the world performing with the chorus and has appeared on their recordings. I asked him about his role in the organization and he shared,

So I see my role really being part of Dennis' musical leadership. One of the things I value about Dennis and I think it's true in many of the gay choruses, is the presentation of the music really focuses on what's the message and what's the feeling. I feel like I have a lot to contribute in a rehearsal setting to convey energy and feeling in a way. . . .And help him as he focuses on the many technical aspects that he needs to and the lyric work and all, so I feel like I'm very much a help to bring that unity of voice musically (personal interview, July 12, 2013).

Kevin Gallagher has been the performance interpreter, using the art of sign language (ASL) to provide visual interpretation of musical performance for the Seattle Men's Chorus since 1981. He grew up in the Bronx and trained at the New York School for the Deaf (Flying House Productions, n.d.d) and was one of the first to be interpreting at Lincoln Center (personal interview, May 6, 2013). Gallagher has helped to develop the art of visual performance, interpreting in the Seattle arts scene, as well as in the GALA Chorus community, sometimes lending his talents to other choruses at festivals so that they can get a taste of what it would be like to have their own interpreter.

Like Stults, Gallagher first came to the chorus as a volunteer. He explained to me that the start of his tenure with SMC was during a time when signing was not commonplace at shows. Kevin shared the conversation he had with SMC leadership after his first show:

It was years of no contract. No paperwork. It was just that handshake of faith. . . I don't think the chorus was super contractually based at that point but it spoke to the embryonic nature of the chorus that it was based on faith and friendship and a belief in the system. . . .It built and became its own kind of different entity and focus point and angle. I think it has a . . .sense of charm to it that's not very didactic or contractual. . . .And now looking at it as what I believe is the nature of the chorus, it's a very identifiable component, we pioneered way before most arts organizations in the city were paying attention.

**From Emerald City Arts to Flying House Productions.** In the fall of 2002, Jane Lighty and Pete-e Peterson, both retired nurses, approached Dennis Coleman about the lack of women's choruses in the Seattle area. Both had been volunteering with the men's chorus and had attended the Western Regional GALA festival in Seattle. The men's chorus supported the concept of

having a sister chorus and Coleman volunteered to be the director. Later that year, the Seattle Women's Chorus made its first appearance on stage with the SMC. They would appear the next year in their first full-length concert independent of the SMC. The president of the FHP Board and chorus member since 1986 shared,

And to me again, the strength. . . is the fact that we have this diverse and wonderfully complex and incredibly mission-focused organization that allows us to have both the men's chorus and the women's chorus. . . under a single entity. To me, it's like having a family where you have brothers and sisters.

Then, he continued by stressing the importance of not leaving any part of the family out, "What makes your family strong is that you can have all those pieces" (personal interview, July 18, 2013).

As of Fall 2004, both SMC and SWC were operating under the auspices of "Emerald City Arts," an appropriate name since Seattle's nickname is the Emerald City. This business organization oversaw operations, published the chorus magazine, *Chorus Quarterly*, and produced a concert series by artists that aligned with the mission and vision of the choruses. However, the organization soon realized that they were doing more and the name was not indicative of their work in the community. They hired a design firm to help them rebrand which involved a four-month exploration of identity through interviews with staff, singers, and current and former ticket holders. Miller, of the Phinney/Bischoff Design firm said, "Branding is a way to connect with people. And effective brands communicate their values. ECA's brand is that creativity through community can change hearts and minds. All their products are different devices for delivering that promise from a shared set of values" (Updike, 2004, p. 23).

In Spring 2005, the *Chorus Quarterly* was released under its new name, *Flying House*

*Magazine* for SMC and SWC and it was published by its new identity, Flying House Productions. Maria Lamarca Anderson, Director of Marketing and Publications at the time, wrote about the inaugural issue, “Our goal in this and future editions of *Flying House Magazine* is that our enthusiasm about the people, our concerts and the other activities we profile leap [*sic*] off the pages and continue to capture your attention. We have organized the stories in a way that supports key elements of our mission statement” (2005, p. 8). According to the Flying House website, “We are Washington State's largest and most influential choral organization. Flying House Productions ranks third among the state's music organizations in terms of budget, audience exposure, and ensemble size.”

The Seattle Men’s Chorus has also inspired a host of smaller performing groups such as the Gentlemen’s Harmony League, Emerald City Volunteers, Philandros, “The Group Formerly Known as Philandros,” Zipper directed by Coleman, and *Aedonis* directed by Eric Banks. The current small ensemble, Captain Smartyants, consists of approximately 8 men directed by Eric Lane Barnes, who serve as ambassadors of the SMC through vocal comedy. Courcelle (“Song and Pants”, 2002) described the ensemble in their second season, “The troupe is well-rounded in that there appears to be no egos that stand out. They think of themselves as a troupe, not as a group of soloists. Yet each of the members attests to the contributing special talents of their co-members” (p. 16).

**Role of the chorus board.** The board of the SMC started similar to many community choruses—a group of chorus members meeting in the living room of one of the singers. Today, the Flying House Board consists of eighteen members elected to 3-year terms by the membership of the chorus. Since FHP has a fourteen-member professional staff to manage the daily operations, the role of the board is one of making and keeping policy. I met with the 2013

president of the board and asked him about the board's unique role of overseeing two choruses.

He shared with me:

One of the things I set out as my expectation for the board members was, "We represent Flying House Productions," and that I didn't expect to engage in dialogues that in any way pitted any of our groups, whether it's one of our ensembles—SWC, SMC, any of that [*sic*].

Indicating that decisions made in special interest of merely one group or another were not to take place, but rather all decisions were to be made with the larger picture of FHP in mind, he continued, "We make decisions that advance the interests of Flying House as a part of our mission. . . Constance [one of the board members]. . . said, 'You know, one of my lines was, "Before we had SWC, we were only living half our mission.'" (personal interview, July 18, 2013).

One unique aspect of this large arts organization is the buy-in and investment of the membership. The president shared,

Our organization is owned by the membership. That's the way I look at it. Not only are we owned by the membership. . . if you were to look at a typical for-profit, you would say the shareholders are all the members, right? The members not only are the shareholders of our organization, but they're also the people that are responsible for the product that we sell. . . . And that makes us truly unique. And it's both a strength and it's a weakness. It's a strength because the passion that you have is—you don't get anywhere else. It's the reason why our bylaws say that a certain number of our board positions have to be members. It's a weakness, because it also means that unlike most non-profit performing arts boards, our board doesn't tend to be made up of just community members who have a

passion for the arts and dollars to match that. We end up with people who really care about the day-to-day operations stuff. And they care about the member experience. And so they look at board service as a way to have a voice to lend to that (personal interview, July 18, 2013).

**Role of volunteers.** The importance of volunteers in a nonprofit organization cannot be overlooked. In the FHP organization, volunteers have the option of obtaining the designation of “Associate Member” when they contribute a minimum of forty hours per year, which affords them the rights and privileges of singing members including invitations to social functions. SMC has a base of over eighty volunteers and associate members that help support its productions and organizational activities, such as administrative and fundraising tasks. Many reasons are given for the contribution of volunteer hours. Former chorus member, Fran, (Carson, 2004) in the *Chorus Quarterly* stated, “The chorus gave me joy for years. Now that I’m retired I have time to give back” (p. 15). Sam (Carson, 2004) simply wanted to be a part of the chorus; “I would attend the concerts and I so wanted to be a part of it” (p. 15). Volunteer Jane Lighty (Carson, 2004), an integral force behind what would become the SWC said, “We [Jane and her partner Pete-e] wanted to contribute to a musical organization whose mission we supported” (p. 15).

**Outreach programs.** The SMC has undertaken outreach projects for the community. For their collaborative concert with Elektra and the Northwest Girlchoir, they added an extra show for the children of the Seattle Public School District. This concert marked the beginning of a yearly collaborative concert with programming focused on children and free to the community. In addition in 1994, they established a youth ticket program, giving away donor-sponsored tickets to self-identified gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered youth. Since 2013, through a generous donor, SMC and SWC have also been able to provide free transportation to youth

living in the greater Seattle area. Both choruses provide free tickets to those living with HIV/AIDS and their caregivers, through the will-call program of the Lifelong AIDS Alliance. Flying House Productions embarks on over thirty benefit performances per year. During the observation period, SMC traveled to Wenatchee, a town in central Washington, to perform their *Come Together: the Music of the Beatles* concert to benefit the North Central Washington Partnership for Children and Families and a family whose child had committed suicide after being bullied for being gay.

## **Conclusion**

According to Vance George, former director of the San Francisco Symphony Chorus and a former member of the National Endowment for the Arts Chorus Panel, “The Seattle Men's Chorus is very, very good. I just respect enormously what they do—musically, artistically—and I respect the image they present across the nation. They certainly are one of the top groups across the nation in the men's choral movement" (Updike, 1991). For those just meeting the chorus today, it may seem hard to imagine that the polished group of 350 plus men in tuxes gracing the Benaroya stage owe its existence to twenty-two brave men who showed up for the inaugural rehearsal in 1979. As the chorus looks forward to the possibility of owning their rehearsal space, one also needs to remember that the organization used to exist in the basement of a chorus member.

In summary, I used an ethnographic methodology to examine the culture of the SMC, which primarily included field observations of rehearsals and other events, as well as 29 formal interviews. It was through these interactions that I came to understand the SMC culture. The methodology used in this study and the brief history—described using the voices of leadership

and chorus members—sets the stage for the coming chapters examining the culture of the Seattle Men’s Chorus through the lenses of family (chapter 3) and social capital (chapter 4).

## Chapter III

### Chorus As Family

#### Introduction

Fast-forward a few months from my first rehearsal to a Monday evening in February at Plymouth Congregational Church in downtown Seattle. I notice for the first time that Oreoshaped lights hang from the ceiling, casting a florescent glow on the men entering the rehearsal room. The vocal coaches, who are professional singers and conducting students from the University of Washington, are starting to arrive too. They were hired through a special grant to focus on vocal development for the upcoming premiere of the commissioned work, Jake Heggie's *For a Look or a Touch*. I am standing in my usual spot behind the baritone section where I can see the men and Dennis Coleman, the artistic director, but not be in the way of people entering rehearsal and checking in for attendance. I am impressed that such a great number of people are able to make it to a 6:30 pm rehearsal, making sure to leave work on time to battle the notorious Seattle traffic in which a normal 20 minute commute could easily become an hour. I am aware that many skip dinner or have to catch one on the run in an effort to be at rehearsal on time. I have run into many of them at the MOD Pizza restaurant across the street trying to fit in a meal before the downbeat.

John, a gentleman from the baritone section, comes up to me and introduces himself. He asks if I have enough people for my project. I tell him I had an overwhelming response to last week's request for their stories about their SMC experiences but would love to hear his as well. He motions to his partner sitting in the last row of the baritone section and says, "Before we met each other in the Seattle Men's Chorus, we were married for 32 years." He beams and proudly announces that they have ten children and 21 grandchildren between them.

We are forced to cut our conversation short as Coleman takes the stage to lead the chorus in an intonation warm up where the singers move up a half step over the period of 16 counts, reminiscent of a Robert Shaw exercise. John returns to his partner and several men who are socializing at the back hurriedly go to their seats. John is just one of the many who approached to tell me his story that includes recollections of relationships formed within the SMC. I look around and see the tenors in the first row sitting on the edge of their seats eagerly awaiting Coleman's direction. I open the rehearsal agenda that was sent out earlier via email and see that the men will go over most of the repertoire for the upcoming show in concert order. The rehearsal will be well-crafted with attention to vocal technique, diction, and expression with a great amount of modeling by Coleman to get the sound that he wants for each piece. From the outside, this chorus appears to be primarily a highly successful ensemble that sells out their 9 plus holiday shows at the local symphony hall. Upon closer inspection it is much more for its members.

During the course of data collection, singing members, artistic staff, administrative staff, and volunteers were interviewed to add to the fieldnotes taken during observation. The purpose of these interviews was to obtain individual narratives in the words of the participants regarding what it means to be a part of this organization. To help elicit these narratives, interviewees were asked to relate their story of joining the Seattle Men's Chorus, significant moments during their membership, and their reasons for continued participation. Due to my prolonged time in the field, I had established relationships with many of the interviewees and there was a sense of ease during the conversation. For many of the interviews, the retelling of these stories evoked strong emotions that brought tears. With every interview, I gained a deeper perspective into what makes the SMC unique and into answering the main question of this study: "What is the culture of the

Seattle Men's Chorus?" To answer this overarching question, I will first summarize the responses to the interview questions, "Why did you join the SMC?" and "Why do you continue to participate in the SMC?" Even though I interviewed members with diverse backgrounds, the majority of members interviewed cited that they had joined the SMC because they were seeking community and/or a place to sing (i.e., use their musical talents).

### **Reasons for Joining the SMC**

**Seeking community.** When interviewees described the term, "community," they referred to it as a place to feel safe, accepted, and a sense of belonging. This desire stemmed from the fact that quite a few had just moved to Seattle due to work and were looking to make new friends, while others were seeking a place to socialize apart from the pick-up culture that is a part of the bar "scene." (According to Robinson (2008), "Scholars who have examined gay social practices in Western countries describe the scene as a competitive place, familiarity with which will not necessarily guarantee gay men social success or emotional support" (p. 73). In addition, my own experience of visiting gay bars with SMC members confirmed the scene as primarily one that embraces beauty, hedonism, lust, and finding acceptance.

**Seeking musical outlet.** Many interviewees had grown up singing in school and church choirs and now had the time/desire to add singing back into their lives. Other members had extensive training and music degrees from leading music schools, such as the Oberlin Conservatory and St. Olaf College. Each interviewee recalled with great clarity the first concert that marked their debut with the SMC. Their vivid retelling of the various concert experiences was similar to McEwen's (2011) research focusing on the Folk of the Sea Choir where choir members experienced a sense of emotional connection in the retelling of performance accounts.

## **Community Chorus As Family**

Regardless of why the members joined, there were two overarching themes to their experience that reflect the culture of the SMC 1) the chorus as a family and 2) the visionary leadership of their artistic director, Dennis Coleman. According to the United States Census Bureau (2013), “A family is a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family.” While this official definition refers to people with whom we live or are related, sociologists and family scholars offer a more inclusive definition of family based on the emotional bonds of love, commitment, and interdependence. Specifically, Weeks (2000), a sociologist, uses the term “family of choice” to mean an extended network of support that is selected by gay people. Through this network of friendships, a sense of self-worth is developed and a sense of culture confidence is realized (Weeks, 2000). Other terms that are used to describe this entity are “gay family” (Robinson, 2008), “alternative family” (Gagnon, 2004), and “elective family” (Herdt, 1997).

While the concept of a family of choice is applicable to both people who are straight and gay, it holds a special meaning for the gay community. Weeks explains, “For non-heterosexuals the idea of a chosen family is a powerful signifier of a fresh start, of affirming a new sense of belonging, that becomes an essential part of asserting the validity of homosexual ways of life” (pp. 217-218). Several interviewees expressed that they had not received support from their family and churches. The chorus, as a chosen family, helps to fill the gap left by the absence of those support structures. This chapter will explore, through the words of interviewees, 1) how the SMC serves as a family in their lives by providing a sense of self-worth, friendship, and support (Weeks, 2000) and 2) how the visionary work of the artistic director makes this family possible.

**Source of self-worth.** It is a beautiful day in Seattle, the kind of day where people get off work early to bask in the sun around the lake. I am driving to West Seattle to meet someone from the Seattle Men's Chorus whom I feel like I have known for a long time. I cannot pinpoint the day we met but I can recall his friendly smile and that he had mentioned a unique introduction to the SMC. I knew I needed to capture the whole picture. I pull up my car to a purple house that has been turned into a funky coffee shop complete with mismatched coaches and whimsical trinkets. Sean, a mailman by trade, greets me in the "living room" of the cafe with a smile and offers to buy me a coffee, which I graciously accept even though I had offered to buy him one. We sit on a couch like old friends and I remark that I wish I had known about this place sooner as it is the perfect spot to chat and relax. He replies that he thought it would be suitable for our interview since its low-key atmosphere is conducive to talking. We chit chat about the SMC vocal coaches and guest conductors but soon settle down to the point of the meeting. I asked him about how he first came to know about the SMC. He shared,

So here we go, we'll [*sic*] tell you this story. So I was living in Cincinnati. I had just come out; just gotten divorced. And in Ohio if you're a gay man, you're Satan's older brother. <clears throat> So, the level of guilt and crap, it was just like shoot me now. And I met Larry, who is no longer in the chorus but just an angel, and he said, "You sound like you need a change. Why don't you come see Seattle?" (He flies all over the world; it's his favorite city.) So I did. And I went to [an SMC show]. He was in the chorus at the time; and it was the show with Megan Mullally. And it was the show [in which] they sang *Michael's Letter to Mama* (see Appendix H for lyrics). . . .So that made a big impression. And that's the little story on the back of the CD, which I have to tell you, was never intended. I just got back to Ohio, and in the middle of the night wrote

Dennis a little thank-you note. . . Months passed. . . And it was October and I was still in Ohio. And I was at a little restaurant with a guy who's now passed away, Ray. <chokes up> Tough to tell—Ray was a cool guy. So anyhow and it was really noisy; and my phone rang. And all I knew was, it was a Seattle number. And I said, "I'll get it later." And Ray said, "No, no, you have to take it." And I don't answer the phone in restaurants—right? I said, "I'm not gonna get the call." He says, "You have to get it." And I said, "Why?" He said, "Because it's from Seattle; and Seattle makes you happy." So. . . I went outside and answered the phone, and it was Dennis *fucking* Coleman. . . and he said, "Your letter says what we want to say about *Michael's Letter to Mama*. Can we put it on the back of the CD?" And I said, "Yeah." <laughs> He says, "We can change your name." And I said, "Put it in caps."

In the thank you letter to the SMC (see Appendix I for letter), Sean shared,

SMC seems to generate some kind of energy that reaches beyond measures of music to something greater. I was so proud to see you perform: handsome, gifted, generous, happy gay men. Seeing you sing made me proud that I too am openly and happily homosexual.

For Sean, going to an SMC show and becoming a member of the SMC brought about a sense of self-worth as a gay man. Upon coming out of the closet, there was a sense of loss when he became estranged from his family for 30 years. Seeing the chorus confidently sing lyrics with which he identified helped to show him that he was not alone. After singing in the SMC for several years, Sean's work moved him to Hawaii where he had a hard time finding a chorus that provided the same community of support. While SMC was not the impetus for his return, it was a great motivator to return to Seattle. He reflects upon his first SMC rehearsal after his return from Hawaii, "I guess it's a little hard to put into words, the culture, because I walked into that

room and I don't know. It's like you're, whatever it is, 2000 miles? And it *feels a little like home.*"

Talking with Sean helped me to see how being a part of the SMC is more than just standing up on the risers and singing the song assigned to you. In standing up with the SMC on stage, a singer is affirming one's identity in a very public way; and in doing so with 300 men at a high profile arts venue it becomes a very positive and bold statement. When memorizing the lyrics, a singer is forced to engage with the text and literally to commit the statements to his inner being. For some, it may be the first time they have vocalized being gay and it becomes an empowering experience.

***Source of friendship and support.*** Chorus members have weathered many challenges together: death from HIV/AIDS-related illness and death, homophobic persecution at work, disownment and estrangement from family members, and rejection by their religious organizations.

I am waiting in the lobby to meet with 26 year-old chorus member named Chad (all chorus member names has been changed from this point onward). When he was fourteen years old, he came out to his parents who were deeply religious. They enrolled him in therapy and ultimately threw him out of his home. At the age of 17, he joined Diverse Harmony, the nation's first gay-straight alliance choir. When he turned eighteen years old, he immediately auditioned for SMC and has been a member since 2006. His first show was *You Made Me Love You*, a show featuring the songs of Judy Garland. I asked him what made him audition for the SMC. He replied, "I joined the chorus to perform and be in big shows. And it was fabulous, but the community is why I stay." I asked him to speak more about what this community is for him and he replied,

Well, I have 300 fabulous friends. . . .Dennis says if you get through your first quarter, it's really intimidating, but then you have a family. And you really do. I mean it's not true for everyone every time but [for] the majority I think it is. And what's really crazy is that I've been on cruises and I've been all over the country and there's always someone there from the chorus. Like especially [every] seven years there's turnover [in the chorus] and so I know so many more. I never thought I would have so many Facebook friends but the majority is [*sic*] from the chorus. And I've met every single one of them and shared conversations with every single one of them. . . . And, you know, we don't always go out and have drinks. I have my core friends from the chorus that [*sic*] we do talk more frequently. We don't talk often but when we do talk it's a pretty, pretty good connection.

The intimidation that Chad speaks of comes from the sheer number of eyes upon the new members when they are introduced. For many, this is the first time they have not been a minority in a large group and there is a feeling on the first day of being checked out in a friendly way.

While Chad's statement about having 300 friends seems unbelievable, I have found it to be true; the SMC is a community within a community. Every rehearsal has the feeling of a family reunion. People greet each as if they have not seen each other for six months instead of six days. Hugs and kisses are given freely to those who are new members as well as old. (On a personal note, when I walk around Seattle's Capitol Hill, I always run in to men from the SMC and receive warm greetings. In addition, when I get a friend request on Facebook and we have 100 friends in common from Seattle, I am confident that I know how we are connected of course, accept their request.)

Chad's connection to the SMC is all the more meaningful when you find out that in his struggle to accept himself, he tried to commit suicide at the age of 19. Chad shared with me the connection between his recovery and the SMC,

I was notified that I got the solo the night that I wasn't at rehearsal because I just attempted suicide. So when I finally came to, I called up the company manager and I was like, "Don't give away my solo." . . . It felt like I came out of the hospital and we were in [the] show. I mean it wasn't that—It was like a month probably that went by of rehearsals. But that's what it felt like, so *Johnny One Note* was my re-entrance. And it was really cool because the chorus was there to support me.

For Chad, the chorus is a place of musical expression and support. Older members of the chorus have taken him under their wing, helped him obtain scholarships. Currently, he is preparing to be a teacher and serving on an education board for a local theater. For some members, the chorus is the center of their lives. Mark, a chorus member in his 60's, came out to his wife and children later in life. It was a devastating experience for him and the chorus has emotionally helped to fill the void. He shared with me:

I wake up Monday mornings excited that today is chorus. I wish when I woke up the rest of the week that it was [also] Mondays [*sic*] because I feel a part of a group and I don't feel isolated anymore. I feel like I have family and I have a support system. So if I need something, I have a dozen people I can call and say, "I'm depressed; can we go somewhere and talk?" And I have that group of friends that are there for me; and I know that I can say anything and not be judged, where in my old life I couldn't. I couldn't express who I was and felt alone even though I was surrounded by hundreds of people

every week. And I mean, yes, it was still family; but it was a family I couldn't talk to. It's an amazing group of guys.

From meeting with these two men, I have gained a glimpse of the pain that occurs when one is abandoned by your biological family, the very people with whom you think you can be your true self without judgment. The utter joy that someone must feel when they go from complete abandonment to complete acceptance must be unfathomable; and now I know that is why when I first saw a performance of the Seattle Men's Chorus, there was a joy that poured forth unlike I had ever seen or heard. These men were not professionals putting on a good face for the camera or the audience but people who were genuinely connected to the music, to each other, and who wanted us, the audience, to be a part of that experience.

**Conflict in the family.** Certainly, a person experiences negative experiences being a part of any group, whether it is a biological family or a family of choice. As with any large group, people tend to socialize with those they know. During my observations, singers had the tendency to socialize with other singers who joined the chorus at the same time as they did. This tendency is probably due to being a part of the same new member orientation and welcome meetings. In addition, as with any group there were strong personalities who expressed opinions that at times, would disrupt the flow of rehearsal. However, these disruptions were short and kept to a minimum, as Coleman would usually ask them to bring up their concerns at a more appropriate time. (There are many avenues of communication, such as the chorus electronic mailing lists, email addresses for chorus leaders, and "town hall" meetings.) People with strong personalities were not seen as detrimental to the spirit of the ensemble as seen in Jeff's response to the question I posed, "Why do you stay?" He replied, "The music. The feeling of family, even though it's this huge dysfunctional family."

Similar to other choirs, the members of the SMC have disagreements, ranging from whether or not to have annual dues, what to wear in a concert, how long rehearsals should last, the presence of snacks during rehearsals, the types of comments allowed on the electronic mail list, and the amount of choreography that should be expected in one show. Some of these topics have incurred long, heated discussions in open “town hall” forums, as well as online. Where in other choruses these types of conflicts may propel members to drop out, for SMC members of they accept conflict, try to resolve it, and then move on to the greater goal of musicking. The SMC family, creates a new paradigm by making points of conflict an opportunity for conversation, not division. This spirit of resolution is due to the chorus leadership and the artistic director, which will be addressed in the next section. This system of conflict resolution gives hope that the future of this chorus is safe and will endure no matter the challenge.

John, a member in the chorus since 1982, has been a witness to the culture of the chorus from almost the beginning, said, “You know, I can’t think of anything else that’s been more significant in my life and probably. . . I think I could easily say that for hundreds of people who have been chorus members and still treasure. Some of them have been away for 20 years or more.” The fact that a sense of connection remains after a member leaves the chorus attests to the power of the shared musical experience within the SMC.

**Unexpected family.** In addition, this concept of family has appeared in the most unexpected places within the SMC. One would expect gay men to find a sense of community within a gay choir. What I did not expect was testimony to the fact that a straight man would find healing and friendship within in this group. Roger joined the chorus in 1999. While he knew the chorus had a gay identity, he did not realize until he became active that he would be the only

straight man in the chorus. (There are more straight men now but they are definitely a minority.)

He related to me his experience:

We started rehearsing and I loved the songs and . . .everybody was just so friendly and so nice. The music was awesome and *Does Your Mother Know That You're Out* is one of my favorite songs of all time from all of my chorus experience[s]. . . .I joined in January and we had [the] retreat like a month after I joined. . . .I just had a wonderful experience and I was at a time in my life where I was going through some relationship issues and things like that. And I just found. . . not only for a gay person but [also] for a straight person, it was just a great family. It's just part of the mission.

One would expect that the strong family bonds within the chorus would make Roger feel uncomfortable or left out. However, the SMC has embraced the family ideal of accepting everyone regardless of sexual orientation. As a result, Roger found support and musical fulfillment in an organization whose identity was different from his own. This means that the SMC has truly embraced and been successful in their mission “to entertain, enlighten, unify and heal our audience and members, using the power of words and music to recognize the value of gay and straight people and their relationships” (Flying House Productions, n.d.c). If a straight man can find a sense of community and family among 350 gay men, then there exists the possibility that the SMC can create bonds of friendship to the greater community.

### **Visionary Leadership**

Without a doubt every interviewee expressed the same sentiment: At the center of SMC as a chosen family to its members is the Artistic Director, Dennis Coleman. It is through his visionary leadership that the ensemble has become a family, an extended network of support that engenders self-worth and self-confidence. Coleman has taken very intentional steps to ensure

that the membership is inclusive and that the rehearsal process is one that brings out the best in each individual and the ensemble as a whole. Coleman's leadership style and philosophy will be explored in this next section.

**Inclusive membership.** When I first met Coleman at a rehearsal I was instantly put at ease. Here was a man who deftly led 300 men in song each holiday season to sold-out crowds. He shook my hand and when I said, "Thank you." He said, "Of course" and that he would love to talk to me sometime about music literature for his women's chorus. It was with these kinds of sentiments running through my head that I met with Coleman for lunch at Café Flora in the Madison Park Neighborhood of Seattle, a restaurant known for wonderful local vegetarian fare. We are seated in the shady garden in the back of the restaurant. Coleman seems so pleased to see me as if he were the one interviewing me instead of the other way around. Many questions crowd my mind: In this day and age of strategic planning, social media engagement, and trying to stay relevant, how did Coleman envision changing the world through a chorus of 350 members performing in the flagship hall of Seattle? How did he manage to avoid the pitfalls that have befallen so many conductors today from declining audiences, bickering boards, and aging singers?

In my research, I had been reading old *Music Man* (chorus membership newsletter) from the first ten years that one of the chorus members was distributing to the chorus via email with updates about current members. I opened our conversation about something I had read in a recent *Music Man*.

**Wendy:** [A *Music Man* article said] we recently hit 111 members; and we want to make sure that we stay around 100 members. So I just was wondering how it came to change and—

**Dennis:** You know I think a chorus culture absolutely evolves—and you can't set down a rule at Year 10 or something that you're going to expect to be functional at Year 30, necessarily. It's just like my church. We're a progressive theology. Our catch phrase is: "God is still speaking." In other words, constantly exploring what's new; and new attitudes and new values and everything else. So my personal value as far as membership in the chorus has always been to make it open to as many people that meet a basic qualification and that want to give their time to sing. Because I see the chorus as a church—I've told you this before probably—and I'm not going to turn people away just because I have too many baritones or because the board at some point says we want to stay at 100. You know? And so honestly we just kind of—we roll with it. I guess [that] is what I'm trying to say.

SMC was once a 22-member organization who thought that it was not possible to exist healthily beyond 100. However, it has beaten the odds even with the philosophy of placing the needs of the singers ahead of choral needs. Coleman continued:

So all these different things affect the size of the chorus. It sort of always stays right around 200; and it's been like that for many, many years. And our standards of bringing people in are a little tighter than they used to be. But we still believe—Rhonda [assistant conductor of SWC] and Eric and I all sort of hold to the idea that there are some people that really need this experience; you know, for whatever—their partner just died, they have no friends, they just moved to the city. There's [sic] so many scenarios and so we do our best to help those people and to make sure they can find a place. And sometimes we'll let them on probation. . . Some of our finest members joined that way; they weren't quite there musically, but they really needed it. And it's become their home and it's their

life now. And it's like their church. I keep going back to that because to me it's a perfect analogy.

More than an artistic director, Coleman oversees the health of the SMC much in the way that a pastor would care for his congregation. He prioritizes a singer's need for the ensemble over his need for a balanced numbers in each section of his chorus. In doing so, people who are in need of the most encouragement and support (even though they may not know they need it) are given the opportunity to be a part of their ensemble. This sets a wonderful precedent to be followed by the rest of the ensemble; while the musical product is important, how they treat and interact with one another in the process is also paramount. By not focusing on growth, but on meeting the needs of the people around him, Dennis has helped the chorus grow to become the largest community chorus in North America. He has invited people who are in need of a community to join the ensemble and then trained them to be ready and able participants of the chorus. In doing so, he has fostered a sense of family unity, loyalty, and commitment.

**Positive rehearsal atmosphere.** It is now the month of October and it is time to rehearse *O Come All Ye Faithful* at the retreat. Coleman addresses some pitch problems in individual sections. He is very efficient and runs short phrases, pointing out where parts tend to get swayed by another. After a run-through, Coleman addresses the topic of diction. "If you put too much of a sharp *T* on *let us*. It sounds like a vegetable, first of all. And secondly, it sounds very. . .kind of pansy. *Let us. Let us*. It just sounds really gay." After the chorus laughs at his statement, they are back at work refining the lyric. Many interviewees commented favorably on Coleman's rehearsal style. According to Jeff, "He has a way of keeping us in the balance of fun but then reeling us back in to say, 'Okay, we're going to focus on the task.' But he lets us have our fun. It's a delicate balance and he's able to do it." Mark stated, "Dennis is great. . .He tries to be the dad

and be the serious one. . .but you can tell he's laughing hysterically, right along with us—even though it's taking time away from the rehearsal.” This is just one example of how Coleman uses humor to help demonstrate a pedagogical point and maintain a positive atmosphere in rehearsal. Other times, the joke is on him when his instructions accidentally create a double entendre to which he usually chuckles, shrugs his shoulders, and moves the rehearsal forward. I asked Coleman about his rehearsal philosophy. His response was:

We get the job done; and we get there in a fun, energizing way that makes you want to come to chorus, that makes you happy that you're there. . . .There are times when they talk to one other; other times I keep that rehearsal going so quick <knocks fast> that nobody has time to breathe almost.

Coleman is not running a rehearsal for the sake of laughter, joking or having fun. His intention is an atmosphere where there is joy and connection in the musicking. He summarizes the family atmosphere of the rehearsal, “You want to come. You have friends there. You look forward to seeing them. You know you're safe in terms of the conductor; you trust him to get you where you need to be.” When Coleman speaks of feeling *safe* he is referring to the a rehearsal atmosphere in which the singers trust that the conductor has their best interests at heart musically as well as personally. There is a something very vulnerable about singing since the instrument is essentially your body. For many singing is very personal, tied to their identity, and requires great amounts of courage. A conductor must be very careful when giving constructive feedback that it refers to the voice and not the person. In addition, he/she must be cognizant that singling a person out as a negative or positive example could have detrimental consequences.

In addition, Coleman's leadership style is one where he takes responsibility for the musical product of the chorus. In regard to performances Sean explained, “He's never blamed us

for anything. [When giving show notes] he will always say, ‘That’s my fault. That happened because I did this.’ We know it’s our fault. No one’s kidding anyone. We know we did it. But that’s the way he is and then he’ll move on.”” This philosophy has helped to create an atmosphere in which, for the SMC, musicking is at its optimal and it becomes a human experience that supports and uplifts. People walk out of rehearsals feeling good about themselves and proud of the ensemble, thereby creating that sense of family. Then this feeling extends outside of the rehearsal where they are eager to share the music with the greater community.

Whether Coleman used the word family before he created the familial atmosphere or there was a sense of family before the vision was put forth on paper, it has contributed to a sense of ownership in the chorus that many conductors would be envious. Chorus member Ryan shared,

One of the dynamics that I find fascinating about the chorus is how dedicated members are to it. We’ll get close to a show and Dennis won’t feel comfortable that it’s ready. It’ll be Monday night and he’ll say, “We’re going to have an extra rehearsal on Wednesday night” with just the complete faith that 160 of the 180 people who are singing will drop whatever else they were planning to do and will show up—and they will.

Singers are willing to make sacrifices for the betterment of the whole group. Lest you think that the ensemble just loves being in the spotlight in famous venues, I discovered that the members truly love and find value in musicking for and with another. The value of the family experience is equal to or outweighs the experience of going out and performing.

Chorus member Sean explains:

You know a little secret? And it’s true for me; and I suspect I’m not alone. The actual performance part of it is—if Dennis said, “We’re going to rehearse and then we’re going

to do the show in an alley behind Safeway [Grocery Store].” We’d all come. The performing part is nice but it’s—just the experience of being together and rehearsing and being with Dennis has its own value that that’s [performing for an audience is] just icing. You know, when you come out and there’s that ridiculous amount of applause and everything? It’s on top of the benefit we already got.

Ron shared the impact that Dennis has had on his life, “And that for [my] 30 years [in SMC], he has made SMC his life and has made his [journey of personal] healing SMC’s healing. He has been—there are very few people I could say this about—one my personal heroes.”

Coleman uses his role as artistic director to create an ensemble that supports one another musically, as well as emotionally. He does this by taking the time to look at the whole person during the audition and asking, “What can the SMC do for this person?” His rehearsals also take into account the social nature of musicking especially inherent in the choral ensemble and the personal nature of singing. Coleman’s example of pastoral leadership and admonishments to be humble about SMC’s success has helped to sustain and promote the Seattle Men’s Chorus as a family of choice.

## **Chapter Summary**

In summary, the SMC revealed itself as a family of choice, an ensemble that provides a sense of self-worth, support, and friendship for its members. For gay and straight men, the chorus is a place of musical expression within a supportive community that, for many members, is central to their lives. The presence of conflict was rarely, if ever, truly divisive and resulted in points of discussion and debate seeking resolution and keeping in mind the overarching vision and mission of the chorus. As a result, conflict never escalated to the point of being destructive and usually ended amicably. At the head and heart of this family is the artistic director, Dennis Coleman. He leads with the philosophy that, while singing is what the chorus does, it exists as a

place of healing and support for the members and the greater community. It is this sense of mission that guides everything from the flexible size of membership to the positive rehearsal atmosphere, replete with fellowship and community.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Analysis and Discussion**

This ethnographic study sought to uncover and examine the beliefs and behaviors that defines the culture of the Seattle Men's Chorus (SMC). For many members of the SMC (gay or straight), the chorus holds an important place in their lives. From the time that they nervously walk in to audition, to the time of the post-show celebration, they are part of a community forged by the common experience of musicking together. They are led by an artistic team with decades of shared experience, skilled in preparing an amateur performing ensemble for the professional stage while honoring the integrity of the rehearsal process and empowering them to be musical and civic leaders in their community. To ensure continuity in this vision, a board of directors that includes their peers who ensure that the mission is being sustainably carried out governs them.

In line with standard qualitative research methods, this examination has followed an inductive process from the collection of data and the use of open-ended questions, to the analysis of data in the formation of themes (Creswell, 2014, p. 66). Also in line with qualitative research methods, these themes will be compared with existing literature/theory (Creswell, 2014, p. 65); and this existing literature/theory will be employed as a broad explanation of the culture being studied (Creswell, 2014, p. 74). [Not to be confused with a grounded theory approach, in which a theory is proposed that is grounded in information from participants (Creswell, 2014, p. 66).] As such, the sociology of the chorus that was explored in chapter three will now be compared and explored through the existing literature on social capital.

To further an understanding of the culture of the SMC, this chapter will examine the sets of relationships (Small, 1998) in the Seattle Men's Chorus through the theoretical lens of social capital. These sets are 1) member to member, 2) chorus to artistic director and 3) chorus to

community. According to Woolcock, Grootaert, Narayan, and Jones (2004), since social capital is used to describe the ways in which members of a group interact, “It is possible to conduct a map of a community’s associational life, and thus with it a sense of the state of its civic health” (p. 11). In line with this philosophy, a map or model of the SMC’s relationships will be put forth to examine its health. Using a social capital lens will further reveal the strengths of the SMC and provide a possible model for other choruses with similar structure, goals, and/or demographics.

In the following section, the interactions of the SMC will be explored through the lens of social capital. Particular attention will be given to the types of social capital that are manifested and maintained by the chorus. Through emergent data, I characterize the nature of the bonding capital, linking capital, and bridging capital through the indicators used in previous research. This approach is similar to the procedures used by Dabback (2008).

### **Introduction to and Overview of Social Capital**

“Social capital refers to the features of an organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate cooperation and coordination for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1995, p 67). According to Merriam-Webster (2014), capital is defined as “a store of useful assets or advantages.” Physical capital refers to physical objects such as machinery and technology; and human capital refers to the properties of individuals such as creativity or education (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock et al., 2004). When examining social capital one focuses on the potential in the relationships and connections, such as trust and reciprocity or networks (Putnam, 2000). These networks may be formal or informal. In terms of the arts and specifically music, social capital can facilitate musicking while also being a byproduct of endeavors with purely artistic goals (Putnam, 2000). For example, there are choirs who form with the sole objective of creating high quality performances. While becoming close friends is not the main objective, in the process of

working together towards this common artistic goal, bonds may be formed between the singers that create a sense of trust and reciprocity.

All forms of capital, including social capital, can be used towards positive and negative ends. According to Woolcock and Narayan (2000):

The basic idea of social capital is that family, friends, and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called on in a crisis, employed for its own sake, and leveraged for material gain. What is true for individuals moreover, also holds for groups. . . .Conversely, the absence of social ties can have an equally important impact (p. 226).

In Putnam's view, there has been a decline in social capital in the United States since the late 1990's, and this decline could have a detrimental effect on a personal level and community level. It is his opinion that social bonds are a great predictor of satisfaction in life, crime rates, and other measures of quality of life. While acknowledging that art for its own sake is valuable, he promotes it as a vehicle for building bridging bonds. Putnam wrote,

Let us find ways to ensure that by 2010 significantly more Americans will participate in (not merely consume or "appreciate") cultural activities from group dancing to songfests to community theater to rap festivals. Let us discover new ways to use the arts as a vehicle for convening diverse groups of fellow citizens (p. 411).

While the point of this study is not overall life satisfaction, Putnam has a point that participating in arts groups is a great way to create social bonds because it creates opportunities for people to connect with people different from themselves.

Social capital can facilitate action in and amongst organizations (Coleman, J., 1988) and appears in three forms: bonding, bridging, and linking capital. An overabundance of one type of social capital may prohibit another type from forming. For example, too much bonding capital

may prevent bridging and linking capital from forming (Cox and Caldwell, 2000; Putzel, 1997). However, according to Stone (2003), social capital can help people/organizations to get by (bonding). More significantly, particularly in this study, is the power of bridging and linking capital to help an organization get ahead through “cross-cutting ties” (Stone, 2003, p. 1). In the following section, the three types of social capital will be explored.

**Bonding Capital.** Bonding social capital consists of the horizontal ties present within closed networks, such as people of the same demographic, family, close friends, neighbors, and work colleagues (Stone, 2003; Woolcock et al., 2004). It can be found in ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based women’s reading groups, country clubs, sports teams, and college sororities or fraternities. All of these groups possess distinct identities and are made up of similar personnel. Bonding creates strong loyalties between members of the group. According to Putnam, (2000), it is also known as “sociological superglue,” referring to the social bonds that keep a group together.

In the context of choral ensembles, examples of bonding capital can be found in church choirs, ethnic ensembles such as African American gospel choirs, and college glee clubs, especially those with a long lineage. Bonding capital can also be found in children’s choir programs such as the San Francisco Girls Chorus (SFGC). In the SFGC, choristers literally grow up singing together and have a strong sense of belonging to the point that even after they graduate, they may return to sing in reunion concerts or join an alumni ensemble.

Bonding capital should exist and is necessary in any successful music program, as it helps to promote shared norms and values, such as a commitment to practicing music outside the rehearsal, showing up to rehearsal on time, and working together to recreate a masterpiece that reflects the composer’s intentions. Selling concert tickets, running a buddy program for new

members, and/or holding a retreat may also facilitate bonding capital. When conductors call an extra rehearsal at the last minute before a performance or need volunteers to set up post-concert receptions they are counting on bonding capital (even though they might not know it) to instill a desire to go above and beyond for the sake of the music and ensemble. However, the power of bonding capital lies in harnessing it for the good of the ensemble. By being aware of its presence and how it is created, we can help build sustainable and successful choral programs.

**Bridging Capital.** Bridging social capital consists of ties that look outward across different demographics and fosters “broader identities and reciprocity” (Putnam, 2000, p. 23; Woolcock et al., 2004). This type of social capital is known as “Sociological WD-40” (Putnam, 2000, p. 23) and facilitates cooperation between diverse communities through overlapping networks (Stone, 2003). These overlapping networks help members from one group gain access to resources or ideas from another group due to overlapping membership (Stone, 2003). It can be found within civil rights movements, youth service groups, and ecumenical religious organizations. Bridging networks are good for creating connections to external assets and the dissemination of information. According to Putnam (2000),

To build bridging social capital requires that we transcend our social and political and professional identities to connect with people unlike ourselves. This is why team sports provide good venues for social-capital creation. Equally important and less exploited in this connection [social capital] are the arts and cultural activities. Singing together (like bowling together) does not require shared ideology or shared social or ethnic provenance” (p. 411).

Putnam is advocating the use of music to help build bridges across racial, political, socio-economic, and ideological lines. The shared musical experience of attending a concert or event

builds a connection between a chorus and a community. Through these expanded connections, communities can be strengthened for the benefit of all. In addition, from an arts management point of view, bridging capital is a valuable tool in audience engagement, growing a more diverse chorus, attracting donors, and effectively marketing their organization. Without it, an ensemble has little hope in drawing in new audience members, singing members, supporters, or attendees.

**Linking Capital.** Linking social capital emphasizes vertical ties between organizations, institutions and/or people who possess differing degrees of power or influence (Stone 2003; Woolcock, et al., 2004). Specifically, these ties can be seen between citizens and leaders in formal leadership positions at private institutions, such as banks, and public institutions, such as the police and political parties (World Bank, 2000; Woolcock, et al., 2004). In education, linking capital can be found in the vertical bonds between teachers (higher power differential) and students (lower power differential).

In a choral ensemble, linking capital may be found in the relationship between the board of directors and the organization. ,(Although the current study did not specifically examine this relationship, it did, however, examine the relationship between the conductor/artistic director of an ensemble and its members, another strong example of linking capital in an ensemble.) Traditionally, there is a powerful differential between the “all mighty maestro,” who is known for his temper and ability to fire anyone at will in his orchestra. However, that sociological paradigm has been shifting toward a more egalitarian leadership style in an ensemble context.

Linking capital has been found to be essential in forms of advocacy, such as helping the poor gain resources and a voice in economic development in Third World countries (World Bank, 2000). Therefore, we can make the assumption that conductors or musical leaders may use

their power to help their ensembles or members in their ensembles, gain resources and a voice in the greater community.

### **Literature Review: Social Capital in the Music Ensemble**

The body of research focusing on social capital in music ensembles is in its infancy and limited to only three current studies (Barbosa, 2009; Dabback, 2008; Langston, 2005). Barbosa, Dabback, and Langston all chose qualitative modes of inquiry for their research and an examination into these three studies in the order of publication helps to situate this present research within a growing body of literature.

Through an interpretative case study, Langston (2005) examined the manifestation of social capital indicators such as trust, community and civic involvement; and networks in a community chorus, consisting mostly of retired adults in Australia. Data were collected through surveys, fieldnotes, and semi-structured interviews. He discovered that social capital was present due to the following indicators of social capital: 1) trust (in one's own ability and the ability of others, 2) participation (in the ensemble), interaction, and civic involvement through collaborative performances and personal involvement in outside groups, 3) networks and connections, 4) learning, 5) membership of faith-based organizations, 6) contact with family and friends, 7) shared norms and values that lead to a common bond, and 8) the newly "discovered" indicator of fellowship, which will be addressed in more detail in the discussion section of chapter 5.

Langston noted that a main element in the formation of social capital is the identification of a "new" form of community that is based on shared histories. He suggests that "the identification of such communities has significance for understanding why individuals participate in community groups and how social capital and groups develop" (Langston, 2005, p.

74). Most members of the SMC have shared histories of growing up gay; for some it may have been a negative experience, for other it may have been a positive experience. Nonetheless, as a community of shared histories the study of the SMC holds great potential for understanding its culture and success.

Dabback's (2008) research examined the formation of social interactions and their relation to social capital in the Rochester New Horizons Band for retired-aged adults. Data in this study were collected via group interviews, a researcher-participant journal, and observation fieldnotes. Dabback, the researcher-participant with an insider's vantage point, discovered a strong sense of commitment and community, which indicated the presence of social capital. Bonding social capital was present in their positive comments towards one other and in their desire for social as well as musical relationships. The presence of bridging capital was revealed in the positive comments and connections made between members of the ensemble and the audience at an outreach concert at a local nursing home. Similar to Langston, Dabback found the social capital indicators of trust and shared norms in his ensemble. The culture of supporting and mentoring new members helped to pass on the norms of trust and reciprocity, thereby creating a healthy cycle of interactions in the ensemble.

As with many ensembles, the Rochester New Horizons Band has a hierarchical organizational structure similar to that of a professional or collegiate ensemble. The presence of this vertical structure would usually inhibit the formation of bonding capital. However, in the case of this band, Dabback found the opposite to be true. Due to the development of peer relationships characterized by equality and autonomy that resulted in a high degree of trust and reciprocity, vertical boundaries were balanced by the horizontal relationships. This finding is a profound one for the music community and relates directly to my findings in the exploration of

relationships in the SMC. Because music ensembles possess a hierarchical structure, bonding capital (and therefore trust and reciprocity) may be present and/or created simultaneous to strong leadership personalities, which are often required to lead effective arts organizations. This research also raises questions regarding the uniqueness of the music organization to overcome differences in power to create trust and reciprocity. This phenomenon seems to present ideas that may be useful to develop health and balance in ensemble organizations.

Barbosa (2009) sought to discover the types of social capital present in a set of music projects: a youth wind band, youth orchestra, and community music school in socially stratified Brazil. The orchestra is run by the city municipality; the wind ensemble exists through a partnership with the local university music department; and the music school is run by a non-governmental organization (NGO) that supports bands in the area. The students live in a low-income and high crime neighborhood. Many of their parents are unemployed. Data were collected through interviews, researcher-participant observation, and analysis of documents. Barbosa (2009), the researcher-participant found the presence of bonding and linking capital, which he refers to as “horizontal and vertical associations.” Horizontal bonds or bonding capital was found among the students, as well as between the university and the NGO. Vertical associations or bridging capital was found between the music teachers and students, the NGO staff and the students, the municipal secretaries and the students, and the municipal secretaries and the teachers. Unlike Dabback, his research did not discuss the specific indicators of social capital but focused on the general effect that social capital had on empowering the students to rise out of the social oppressiveness in which they lived. Through learning and performing in the ensembles, they were empowered to break free from the racial and economic oppression instilled upon them by colonization. In other words, being a part of an ensemble helped them realize how

much power they had in the midst of tyranny.

The most significant publication focusing on social capital and choral singing is *America's Performing Art: A Study of Choruses, Choral Singers, and their Impact* (Chorus America, 2003). Chorus America became interested in how choral singers were active in their communities due to Putnam's stance that the arts, especially singing in groups, provide a "powerful way to transcend cultural and demographic boundaries." As part of the study, they asked professional and volunteer choir members a series of questions about their volunteerism, membership in civic organizations, skills they have developed that are useful in community work, charitable giving, ability to mix with people of diverse backgrounds, sociability, and level of political activism (p. 9). Their finding was that "choral singers help build communities and bridge social gaps" (p. 9).

The studies by Barbosa (2009), Dabback (2008), and Langston (2005) provide the foundation for this current study. Langston's (2005) research was first to discuss the presence of social capital in a music ensemble and that it could be found by examining its indicators. His discovery of the indicator, fellowship, demonstrated that there was still much to learn about the concept of social capital within the context of performance. Interestingly enough, two of the studies focused on the presence of social capital in ensembles for retired-aged adults who, by definition, now lead lives in which they have experienced a loss of a community, by way of their work relationships (due to retirement). While not explicit about the hierarchical structure of the Rochester New Horizon Band, Dabback's (2008) contribution to the topic of social capital is in his observation that strong bonds are capable of forming within an ensemble with vertical power structures. The work of Barbosa (2009) acknowledges that relationships built between students and those in power such as teachers, universities, and NGO's can help students imagine and

create a new future for themselves. These three studies are examples where social capital has been used towards positive means for the betterment of lives and the greater community. From the scarcity of research on social capital in the choral context, especially among non-retired adults, this present research helps to fill the gap and extends this prior research.

### **Analysis: Social Capital in the SMC**

The following sections will examine the presence of social capital in the SMC by way of the sets of relationships that are essential in a singing organization: member to member, chorus to artistic director, and chorus to community. For each type of social capital, a narrative demonstrating its presence in the SMC will be put forth. To illuminate other aspects that conductors may want to consider in building social capital in their respective ensembles, additional examples will be provided. Bonding capital was discovered through the presence of the indicators of fellowship, networks, expectations of mutual support, trust and reciprocity, and shared norms and values. Linking capital was present through the indicators of learning, trust and reciprocity, and fellowship. Bridging capital was indicated by trust and reciprocity, learning, and shared norms and values.

**Member to member: Bonding capital in the SMC.** Among members of the SMC, there is a great degree of bonding capital as discovered through the multiple indicators of fellowship, networks, trust and reciprocity, and shared norms and values. The following paragraphs will describe how these indicators manifest themselves in the chorus, and how the chorus is using bonding capital in a positive way that builds community.

***Fellowship.*** The indicator of fellowship was discovered among the members of the SMC, which is significant since it has been largely ignored until Langston's (2008) research on social capital in the chorus. Langston defined fellowship as,

That feeling of trust, camaraderie, togetherness, friendship, warmth, support and deep appreciation of the feelings and needs of members within a group, organization or community for other members of that group, organization or community. That feeling of fellowship is derived from shared interests, experiences, norms and values (pp. 131-132).

From my time observing the chorus, it became apparent that a love for singing and a genuine love for each other brought them together each week in song. In addition, every member that I interviewed mentioned that community, belonging, or getting to know others was an important component of being a part of the SMC. Others mentioned having fun and the blessing of having 300 friends who could help at any moment in the variety of ways. Joseph summed it up:

It was just like the joy of community. It's just being there and feeling—like you don't necessarily feel it right there and then during rehearsal—but you are part of being something greater you can't put your finger on. And there's a purpose to all the singing. It doesn't end with the notes. And it doesn't end with greeting the members of the audience. It's just like an ongoing thing and I find that unique in any of the venues I've been to, any performances be [it] in Europe or New York even [*sic*].

Fellowship is facilitated by the SMC through a snack/social time, retreats, and post-rehearsal social gatherings. Fellowship created by the members of the SMC helped Joseph gain a sense of belonging that extends beyond the rehearsal and after the concert is over. It brings him back every week, year after year, even when there are challenges or other barriers to being in the chorus. Multiply this feeling by 350 men and you get the overwhelming reason why the membership of the chorus has become an example of a healthy, successful chorus among both community and gay men's choruses worldwide.

*Networks.* The presence of networks among members of the SMC is an indicator of social capital and more specifically, bonding capital. According to Jones and Langston (2012), A community music organization such as a choir forms a network within itself. This network may provide bonding social capital support for individuals in their attempts to improve their performance abilities, provides an induction into the choir, and facilitates feelings of comfort and belonging into that organization (p. 125).

There are many networks within the SMC: social, new member/buddy system, musical, work, and personal. As mentioned previously, there is a social network present that provides a sense of support and belonging (cf. Jones & Langston, 2012). The SMC “buddy system” or network helps to “induct” new members into the organization. From the very moment that someone auditions, the chorus wants to make sure that their entrance into the chorus is a pleasant experience. A current member is matched up to a new member to help with everything from getting new music, getting him acquainted with other members, and ensuring he feels welcome in the ensemble. For those members wanting to improve their performance abilities, this network has produced volunteers willing to provide free lessons or create systems of “cheat sheets” to help learn and memorize the music.

While the SMC networks seek to be a support for singers who want to improve their performance abilities, similar to the findings of Jones and Langston (2012), they provide much more. The chorus hired singing member Manuel to take promotional pictures of the chorus, which has helped build up his portfolio and his career. The organization helped Mark to connect by finding ways he could volunteer for the gay community and find meaning in his retirement.

The SMC possesses a great connectedness—made more significant by the fact that the membership totals over 350 members. This number does not even take into account the members

on leave for a show. During my interviews with members, they would jokingly refer to the chorus as the “gay mafia.” This reference was due to the general feeling that if anyone needed anything, musically related or not, someone in the chorus could help or had the connections to make it happen. This interconnectedness is facilitated through an unmoderated Facebook group and two Yahoo electronic mailing lists, one for official chorus announcements and the other for personal matters. On any given day you can find postings of questions regarding places to live, people to hire, where to vacation, recommendations for services, and requests for assistance. Many members have found roommates, business opportunities, and resources through these networking resources, contributing to a better quality of life. The multiple networks at play in the SMC and the dynamic web of connections it creates has contributed to the building of bonding capital.

***Trust and reciprocity.*** Trust and reciprocity are foundational components and indicators of social capital. At the very basic level, trust is needed for a chorus to function; a chorus member needs to know that when he takes a breath to sing, that the rest of his section will be there with him or that, when he puts his hands in the air as part of the choreography, the rest of the chorus will be there to make his contribution look positive. Adding the term *reciprocity* to *trust* elevates the meaning of *trust*, such that it embodies the concept that people will help one another even though they may not see an immediate payback soon or at all.

Trust and reciprocity is present in the SMC and it goes back to the chorus’s founding when being known as gay could mean harassment at work or even termination. Many gay men had to keep the fact that they were singing in a gay men’s chorus a secret for fear of their jobs or their well-being. By attending a rehearsal, each member was actively trusting fellow choir members with their lives

While this sense of imminent threat is not as pervasive now, there is still a sense of trust and reciprocity in the SMC. It is seen in the loyalty that the members show to the organization through their time and donations; their commitment to the mission/vision and activities of the organization; and in their attendance and memorization of the music (cf. Jones & Langston, 2012). In addition, I have been told countless stories about chorus members who have given extra money to help support members who do not have the financial means to go on a retreat, to attend the GALA Festival, or to purchase part of their performance attire.

Another way to look at trust and reciprocity is how well a person can count on his acquaintances to help him in times of crisis or need. To qualitatively measure this, the World Bank's *Social Capital Assessment Tool* (Grootaert & Van Bastelaer, 2002) asked communities how they would collectively act if there was a catastrophe and if there were any people that they could go to for help. While this question was not directly asked of SMC members, they frequently expressed that one of the things they appreciated about the chorus was that they knew that in times of need the chorus family would be there. This sense of trust and reciprocity is reflected in Mark's comment:

If my car broke down and they made an announcement, "Can somebody drive Mark back to Renton?" The hands go up. You know? They wouldn't even think twice that it's way out of the way home. You know, that's the type of group that it is.

The very fact that Mark feels that there are SMC members who would be willing to sacrifice time and energy goes a long way in building bonds in a group. It is even more significant when we find out that he is a relatively new member to the organization.

According to Putnam (2000) "a society characterized by generalized reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society" (p. 21). In the case of the SMC, the chorus does not waste

time counting the cost and benefit of each action towards one another or to the group as a whole. Chorus members are willing to help one another and the chorus as an organization without expectation of return, knowing that at some point someone may be there to help them in time of need. Overall, trust and reciprocity has been demonstrated through members' high commitment to the norms and values of the organization; and their devotion of time and resources to members and the chorus, sometimes at great cost. Trust and reciprocity may be the antidote to petty arguments and conflict that can be present in choruses or any large organizations. With a chorus of 300 members, this sense of goodwill is an extension of the powerful messages of their performances and of "practicing what they preach." This goodwill may be a contributing factor to the abundance and strength of the chorus's bonding capital.

***Shared norms and values.*** For social capital to develop, there needs to be a set of shared norms and values that is accepted and followed (Langston, 2011). The presence of shared norms and values is an indicator of bonding capital. Among the members of the SMC, there is a strong sense of shared norms and values centering on the mission:

Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus entertain, enlighten, unify and heal our audience and members, using the power of words and music to recognize the value of gay and straight people and their relationships (Flying House Productions, n.d.c).

Both chorus members and volunteers cited the mission as one of the key reasons they joined and continue to participate. In giving their time to the chorus, they feel that they are making a difference in this world on social and political levels. For example, in a season that was already very full, dedication to the mission and vision helped to fuel extra outreach performances that were intended to influence the vote on gay marriage along the I-5 corridor in the Greater Seattle Area. In addition, when the chorus was invited to sing for a benefit in Wenatchee to

commemorate the life of a gay youth who had committed suicide, there was an overwhelming response by the members to give up an additional weekend to perform for a great cause that was in line with the mission.

In addition to inspiring members to action and being an indicator of social capital, a strong sense of shared norms and values (as seen in the mission and vision) also has long-term benefits for the choir as a whole. According to Vice (2009), choruses with a strong mission and vision, have the staying power to weather the conflicts that have caused choruses to collapse. In the case of the SMC, one can surmise that its strong mission and vision has helped it to work through interpersonal conflicts among members and to keep it on track towards its larger goal/vision of “a world that values its gay and lesbian citizens.” Not only is the mission/vision clearly written down, but it is known, referenced, and followed by its members. It seems that other choruses who seek to build bonding capital regardless of how different their mission/vision, would benefit from being as clear in their mission/vision as the SMC in its articulation.

The SMC’s sense of shared norms and values comes from its social mission born out of oppression. However, a chorus does not need a social mission to have a strong sense of shared values and norms. Choruses can and should come together periodically to revisit their mission/vision to see if it is still relevant, believed, expressed, and followed. This strategy is also a strategy endorsed by historic choruses from across the United States (Vice, 2009).

***Model of bonding capital in the SMC.*** As outlined above, bonding capital exists among the members of the SMC as indicated by fellowship, networks, trust and reciprocity, and shared norms and values. This bonding capital has strengthened SMC and plays a major role in recruitment and retention. The members return each week because, while being fed musically,

they are simultaneously creating connections with people. When they are tired or stressed out, they still choose to be a part of the chorus because it adds to the quality of their lives. These bonds are not exclusive and, as seen in the previous chapter, bonds are formed between gay and straight men in the chorus. Profound connections are made despite the diversity of age, race, physicality, and socio-economic status represented throughout the chorus family.

The fact that the SMC is such a socially-centered ensemble can be problematic for some of the membership on a fellowship level. For those who have been in the ensemble since its beginnings, being at a rehearsal can be a constant reminder of those who have passed away. For those who are introverted, shy, or have yet to find a small group with which to socialize with during the breaks, it can be awkward. They may find themselves sitting alone during a break or, in contrast, the center of unwanted attention.

Part of the gay bar culture carried over into chorus social events, such as the retreat. This pre-existing culture manifested itself in a playful atmosphere, including alcohol and sexual overtones. This presence of gay bar culture was never a signature of the SMC culture; however, the presence of gay men may have brought some of this culture to the SMC retreat environment. It is significant to note that the SMC staff has established strong guidelines about appropriate conduct during the retreat. There were assigned quiet floors for sleeping and social events without alcohol. To ensure that everyone felt safe at the retreat, a strong message was given during rehearsal that “no means no.” A special meeting was called for those new to the retreat and they were assured that they should feel empowered to speak their mind and report any instances where they felt uncomfortable. Additionally, the following procedures are outlined in the Member Handbook:

Sexual Harassment may be difficult to recognize. It may include any unwelcome sexual

advances, requests for sexual favors or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such conduct may create an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment. If a person feels he or she has been subjected to harassment by a chorus or staff member, the person is urged to immediately contact [*sic*] the Company Manager or Executive Director. Concerns will be promptly investigated, and the person who communicates the concern will not suffer retaliation for the report (p. 4).

As a result, the air of playfulness and fellowship was not sacrificed, and the SMC policies and procedures facilitated a sense that all were members were looking out for one another.

Other conflicts within the chorus have centered around the issues of the code of conduct in non-SMC sponsored events, and the regulation of content and language in both the electronic mailing lists and the talent shows. All of these issues garnered much debate on the electronic mailing lists and in post-rehearsal conversations. However, through open discussions in the town hall meetings and private conversations, members felt that their concerns were heard. In the end, their respect for the overall mission and vision of the chorus outweighed their own individual perspectives and opinions on any given issue.

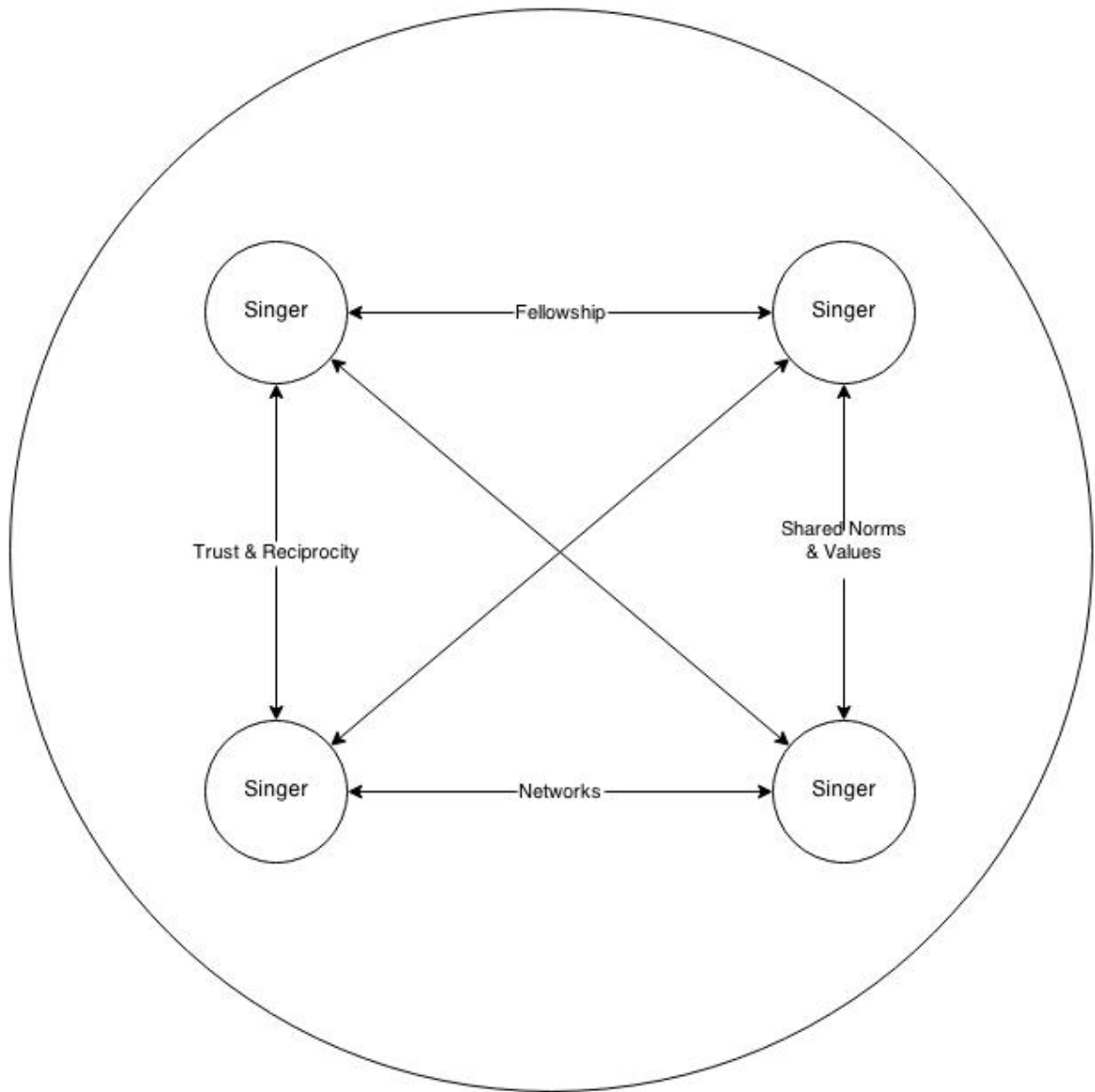
To help facilitate members getting to know one another, they are required, according to the Member Handbook (see Appendix J), to wear identification badges, which serve as name tags at all SMC rehearsals and events. (The badges also have a barcodes on the back, which serve the purpose of recording attendance.) To help new members gain a sense of connection, they are given carefully assigned *buddies* to help the induction process. These buddies mentor the new members and encourage them to get involved early on in the organization. The organization plans several official social events that aid in the creation of bonding capital, including Thanksgiving dinner parties, the Annual Summer Picnic, and cast parties.

As mentioned by a member, the chorus turns over about once every seven years, which is less often than the average GALA Chorus at 1-2 years. SMC members leave the chorus for many of the same reasons that members from other community choruses leave. They have changed jobs and their schedule conflicts with the rehearsal and/or performance schedule. Their family situation has changed (new partner or child) and they need to spend more time at home. Where other choirs have an “in or out” policy (meaning that you are singing or not part of the group), the SMC considers a member as always part of the family and makes it easier to stay connected to the chorus. There are three statuses of membership: 1) *Singing Member*, 2) *On Leave Member*, and 3) *Past Member*. A member may take a leave of leave from the chorus for up to one year without having to re-audition. After two consecutive quarters of absence, he is given the status of *Past Member*. Throughout the whole tenure, members can choose to still be connected to the chorus through the newsletter and electronic mailing lists. Moreover, they are always allowed to drop in and visit a rehearsal, which many choose to do for social reasons.

In addition, the presence of a multiple social capital indicators in the SMC means that members who may not possess a great amount of one aspect of social capital may need to rely on another type of social capital indicator present in the organization. For example, if a singer does not possess a great amount of fellowship, he is most likely bonded to the group through trust and reciprocity and/or shared norms and values. Regardless of the entry point, most individuals are incredibly invested in the SMC organization, its mission and vision, and the returns and benefits created by their relationship with the organization.

Through this research, a model of the SMC’s bonding social capital (Figure 1) has been created. This model illustrates the ways that trust and reciprocity, fellowship, shared norms and values, and networks (all discussed in detail above) serve as indicators of the presence of

bonding capital in the SMC. In this model, note that singers are naturally bound by shared experiences and identities; at the basic level, they find commonalities that naturally occur and bank on those commonalities. This sense of interconnectedness and sameness are the “glue” that allow this organization to exist, and because of the way that SMC has maximized some of these commonalities, to thrive in a time when many performing arts organizations are struggling to continue to exist at the most basic level.



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*Figure 1.* Indicators of Bonding Social Capital Among the Seattle Men's Chorus Members

Other choral organizations could benefit from this type of social capital analysis and mapping of its associations (cf. Woolcock et al., 2004). Bonding capital is assumed in most performing ensembles. At the most basic level, it is assumed that every singer is there because s/he loves to sing. Other grounds of commonality could be a love for the type of repertoire unique to that ensemble or a belief in the ideology of the ensemble (e.g., a church choir). Some choirs are comprised of all lawyers or engineers. One or more commonalities are assumed as a part of any organization; it seems that, of the three forms of social capital, bonding is the easiest to capitalize on.

To strengthen these assumed commonalities, an organization can forge bonding capital in specific ways. For example, choruses may consider developing a sense of fellowship and building networks by holding retreats that have the dual purpose of rehearsing music and strengthening relationships among the chorus. Additionally, formal and informal social activities could be led by members within the group to create a greater sense of ownership. If time is limited, community-building activities could be incorporated into warm ups or closing activities. Informal sectional led by section leaders in members' homes could allow for both productivity and optional socializing.

When examining social capital in a chorus, one should also explore the presence of linking and bridging capital. These two forms as well as the balance juxtaposition between all three will be addressed later. Because bonding capital leverages the commonalities of the group, it is the easiest to build upon. Linking capital involves power differentials and bridging capital involves identity or ideological differentials. As such, the bridging of these differences is often where many arts organizations fall short. The significance of this study is that both linking and bridging capital are not only present in the SMC, but they are exemplary in their manifestations.

Perhaps this is yet another reason they seem to be so successful.

**Member to artistic director: Linking capital in the SMC.** In spite of the large number of members in the chorus, many feel a close connection to their conductor, Coleman. Over and over through every interview, Coleman and the music are the threads that weave this narrative of the SMC together. Jerry, a chorus member said it well,

We all love Dennis. We all have a soul-connection to him that is deep and profound and he's our father, our mother, our pastor. . .He can be stern, but he does it in a way that he gets away with it and we love him to death.

The presence of linking capital is significant since the differences in power between a leader and his/her organization often prevent a relational connection from forming. However, in this case, the relationship between the singing members and the artistic director are characterized by the social capital indicators of shared norms and values, learning, trust and reciprocity, and fellowship. Each of these indicators will be explored through examples of how they were manifest in the SMC.

**Shared norms and values.** Coleman is the energy behind the mission and vision (shared norms and values) of the SMC. While he is not the founding director, his passion and work have shaped the chorus into what it is today. Jerry, a singer in the chorus shared, "If you ask the members of our chorus why are they involved—I don't know what the percentage is, but—the answer is going to be, 'Part of the reason that I'm here is Dennis.'" When one is in a rehearsal with Coleman, his sense of mission for the rehearsal and the chorus is evident. He will point out the history behind the song, reveal the deeper meaning behind a lyric, and bring to light how the song connects to current events in the community. This pastoral and father-like has helped to establish and capitalize on the shared norms and values within the rehearsal as the men prepare

their shows.

In 2000, Coleman was honored with a GALA Legacy Award for this work. Former GALA executive director, Ken Cole said this about Coleman and his sense of mission (“Legacy,” 2000):

Since joining Seattle Men’s Chorus in 1981, SMC Artistic Director Dennis Coleman has used the power of music to create a world that accepts and values its gay and lesbian citizens. A founder and two-time Board member of GALA Choruses, Coleman has dedicated his life to the lesbian and gay choral movement. . . .and developing Seattle Men’s Chorus into one of the world’s premier choral organizations (p. 24).

Just because a chorus has a somewhat homogenous demographic due to race, socioeconomic status, religious identity, etc. does not mean necessarily mean that its members will get along or that the chorus will be easy to lead. Every person’s experience as a minority is different while being a part of a minority group can be positive, it can be equally negative due to strong opinions born out of suffering and oppression. In addition, there can be differing opinions regarding how far a group should integrate into the majority or the methods with which they should change the opinions of the majority.

A choir does not need to possess a mission focused on social justice or a goal of becoming a chosen family to establish clear, shared norms and values. All choirs, regardless of the make-up of personnel, can establish the shared norms and values based on the assumptions that they have a common motivation for participation and that musicking involves a set of relationships (cf. Small, 1998). In other words, the director of a high school choir, rural church choir, or college choir of majors can help create shared norms and values based on the two principles that 1) her choristers love to sing and 2) that singing in a chorus is a social endeavor.

Due to these common norms and values, all people and the music they produce should be respected. Whatever the mission and vision may be, it can be and should be clearly communicated by the artistic director to the chorus. In the case of the SMC, the fatherly and pastoral ways of communicating the mission and vision (shared norms and values) serve to leverage the linking capital present in the organization.

**Learning.** While some community choirs like to come together and only sing works they know, this research indicates that the act of learning music together will build social capital that can further a group's aims. Small learning goals or new literature can be introduced to help keep a chorus' artistry growing. The social indicator of learning is evident in the SMC and a key component of rehearsals. According to Langston and Barrett (2008),

Learning not only results from the kinds of interactions that foster social capital (e.g., actions that develop trust, networks, shared norms and values), but also helps to facilitate the development of social capital by providing opportunities for social capital to be created (p. 123).

For the SMC, it is this second aspect of learning that will be examined; the process of learning new music for a show provides opportunities for leveraging social capital, specifically for linking capital to be developed between the chorus and the artistic director.

The building of linking capital is facilitated by meaningful learning experiences. These experiences are made meaningful by the selection of diverse repertoire (classical, jazz, gospel, traditional, Broadway, contemporary and popular) and how Coleman makes the repertoire accessible through effective teaching. The men are learning and singing repertoire that is according to Coleman "relevant to their lives, to their experience, to their dreams and hopes." In addition, the men are singing and learning a diversity of repertoire that is intended to bring a

“laugh, tear, and a chill” or an emotional arc to the audience. The laugh often equates to youth-like entertainment and the tear to something emotionally meaningful; and the chill comes from beauty of the choral art form itself or Coleman’s masterful programming. However, in learning to create a holistic experience for the audience, the singing members reap the benefits of a “laugh, a tear, and a chill” themselves in both rehearsal and performance. These shared learning and performing experiences have created enduring connections between the singers and the artistic director who has guided and mentored them in the whole process.

The second aspect of these learning experiences is the accessible way in which Coleman teaches the diverse repertoire, which encompasses everything from Brahms to the Beatles. From the moment that one observes Coleman lead warm ups, based on the teachings of Robert Shaw, Joseph Jennings, and Rodney Eichenberger, one is aware that he is thinking like a teacher. He knows how to speak to a chorus of diverse abilities and to evoke the type of sound that he wants whether it is a bright pop sound or rich “classical” sound—using imagery, kinesthetics, and music theory. According to Bret:

He instills seeds in people’s brains [regarding] what they need to do to have a successful performance. . . .And I think he’s able to really make it simple enough for people who have no musical training to understand. . . .But he also communicates it in a way that someone who does have musical knowledge knows what he’s talking about as well. He’s really good at balancing that.

Most conductors understand experientially that choir members like what they know. Coleman, through his teaching and facilitating of meaningful rehearsal experiences, has been able to engage novices with little to no familiarity with the repertoire and/or music literacy, while simultaneously mentoring those who hold music degrees from prestigious institutions. Combined

with repertoire that is specifically selected or commissioned for the ensemble, the rehearsal process becomes one in which learning and social capital feed off of one another. Excellence in the process of learning new music strengthens the relationship between chorus and conductor, which helps to break down the potential barriers established by the power differentials inherent to their contrasting roles. In turn, this whole process helps to facilitate future musicking.

***Trust and reciprocity.*** The presence of trust and reciprocity between the chorus and conductor can be built through careful planning and preparation on the conductor's part. S/he will earn his/her singers' trust if conductor gestures and facial expressions help the ensemble to perform to their best ability.

The indicator of trust and reciprocity was observed in the relationship between the chorus and the artistic director of the SMC. The singers are willing to work very hard because they know that they can trust that Coleman will be there for them in performance. This trust comes from the success that they have experienced under his leadership, as evidenced in Jim's thoughts:

I think a large part the success of it [the chorus] is Dennis' artistic vision. I mean, as a singing member I may not always agree with the song selection that we have, or I might not always like the concert. But I do trust that Dennis puts together a really tight, entertaining show. . .His artistic vision is amazing, absolutely amazing.

This statement reveals the chances that all chorus members will like every piece in their repertoire is very slim. However, Jim's trust in Coleman's vision for the chorus helps him to get over any dislike he may have with a repertoire selection and to remain active as a singer. It also means that when Coleman wants to take risks with repertoire that might be out of the chorus's comfort zone, he can bank on the trust he has earned from his singers.

This sense of trust in Coleman goes even further than a minor disagreement regarding

repertoire. If Coleman asks anything of the chorus, in the words of one member they would “walk through fire” at his request. As Ron, a member of the chorus since 1983 said, “[For him,] we will sing instead of eat, instead of sleep. We will [not take care of ourselves and] get sick, because he’s asked us to sing and that’s what we do.” Coleman has earned the trust of his singers by supporting his singers on stage through his conducting and leadership. Ron explained to me that the chorus never has to worry when Coleman is up on the podium. They trust that he will give them everything they need. Mindful of the music, he is always there for his men, cueing notes, lip-syncing the words, and giving reminders about choreography.

This mutual trust has resulted in a great synergy between conductor and ensemble that is felt by the men on stage and witnessed by the audience. The singers feel empowered to give of their talents because Coleman will be there to help them succeed. In addition, this feeling of trust has made the chorus feel that they have accomplished more than they thought possible.

According to John, “I well remember what the chorus was like before Dennis. And I’ve watched step by step as Dennis brought us to the next level. [At] every level people go, ‘We can’t do that.’ ‘We’ll fall apart.’ ‘Oh, we couldn’t.’” But somehow they do it, and they do not fall apart; that experience builds profound trust. The chorus recognizes all that they are learning from their rehearsals through the artistic staff, and especially Coleman, helps them to be successful in performance. The more success and affirmation of their gifts they experience, the more they are willing to put in the time necessary to make a show successful, even at a great personal cost. This experience of trust and reciprocity between conductor and choir is a significant reason the organization is highly successful.

***Fellowship.*** Conductors can instill an atmosphere of fellowship through openness and vulnerability on the podium. Creating fellowship in a chorus does not have to be an extroverted

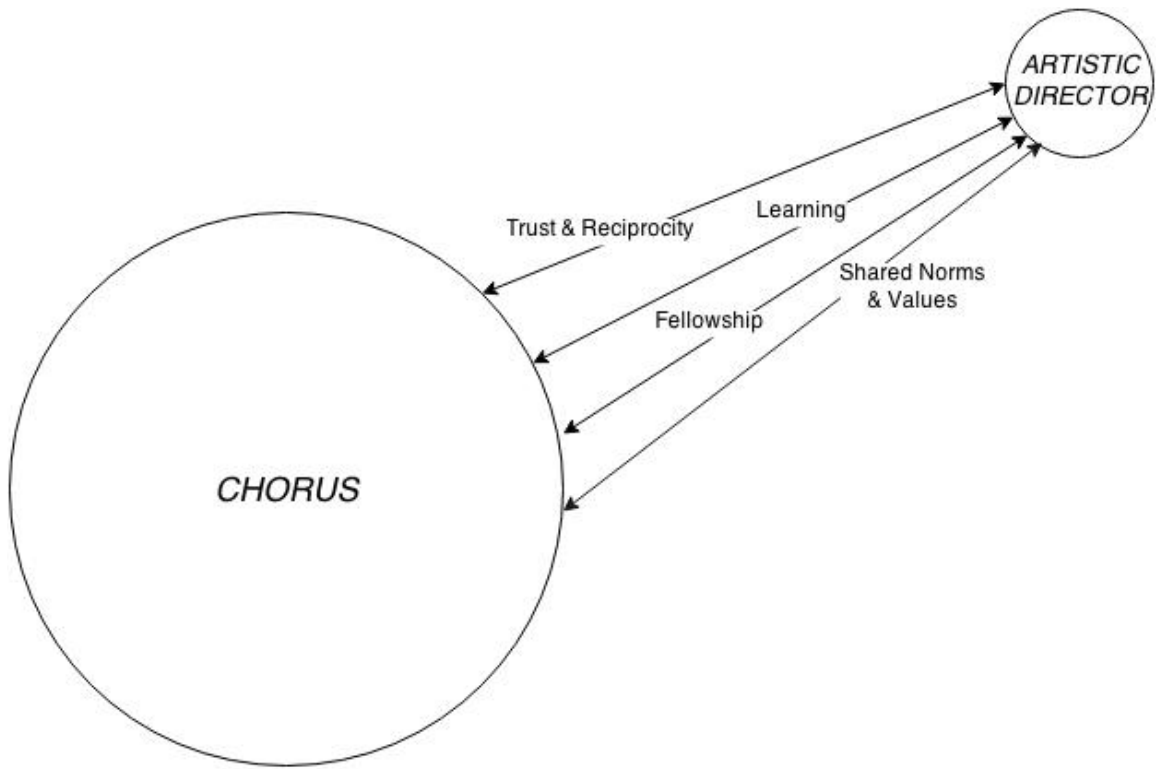
act. It can be accomplished through a quiet connectedness and forged through a shared musical moment or look of affirmation. In the SMC, the indicator of fellowship has been witnessed between the artistic director and the chorus—*during rehearsals*. Fellowship is not an indicator that one would normally expect between a leader and his chorus. However, Coleman has broken down the traditional walls between conductor and chorus by creating a feeling of community in the chorus. SMC rehearsals have more than an air of teaching and learning music. The environment is also one of fellowship, an indicator of social capital. This is done through an atmosphere that balances fun and productivity. Every rehearsal, while focused, is embedded in a playful atmosphere, which helps to alleviate all the work being done and gives a feeling of camaraderie to a chorus that volunteers their time. When the chorus makes a mistake, Coleman may choose to tease a section, which—after a laugh—makes them work harder. This atmosphere also encourages the men to sing out and not to be afraid of making mistakes. This convivial atmosphere has its bounds as Coleman once shared:

We get the job done; and we get there in a fun, energizing way that makes you want to come to chorus, that makes you happy that you're there. . . . There are times when they talk to one other; other times I keep that rehearsal going so quick <knocks fast> that nobody has time to breathe almost.

However, if the members feel that Coleman is being too hard on them, they will playfully push back. On occasion, members have lovingly held up their binders in rehearsal with the word “Bitch” emblazoned on the back. In other contexts, this act may be seen as a sign of disrespect. However, in the Seattle Men’s Chorus, the gesture assumes a human-to-human equality, turning the traditional hierarchical conductor-to-choir relationship on its head. Coleman always takes such behavior in stride and is humble and secure enough to let it go or even play along.

While this relaxed atmosphere or leadership style is not for everyone, what is important is that it is possible for a sense of camaraderie to be created between a chorus and a conductor in the course of rehearsal. When a conductor is trying to create an egalitarian relationship between conductor and choir while still maintaining distinctively hierarchical roles, it is important that the conductor remain true to his/her own personality both on and off the podium. This human connection across the boundaries of power differentials builds a relationship in which the musicking experience becomes more meaningful for the singers, audience, and the conductor. While this research study limited its examination of the presence of linking to the relationship between the artistic director and the chorus, linking capital could also be found between a chorus and its board, an ensemble and donors, or volunteers and the board. Future research may want to examine these additional sets of relationships with regards to linking capital.

***Model of linking capital in the SMC.*** Linking capital is present in great strength between the chorus and Coleman as seen through the indicators of shared norms and values, learning, trust and reciprocity, and fellowship (Figure 2).

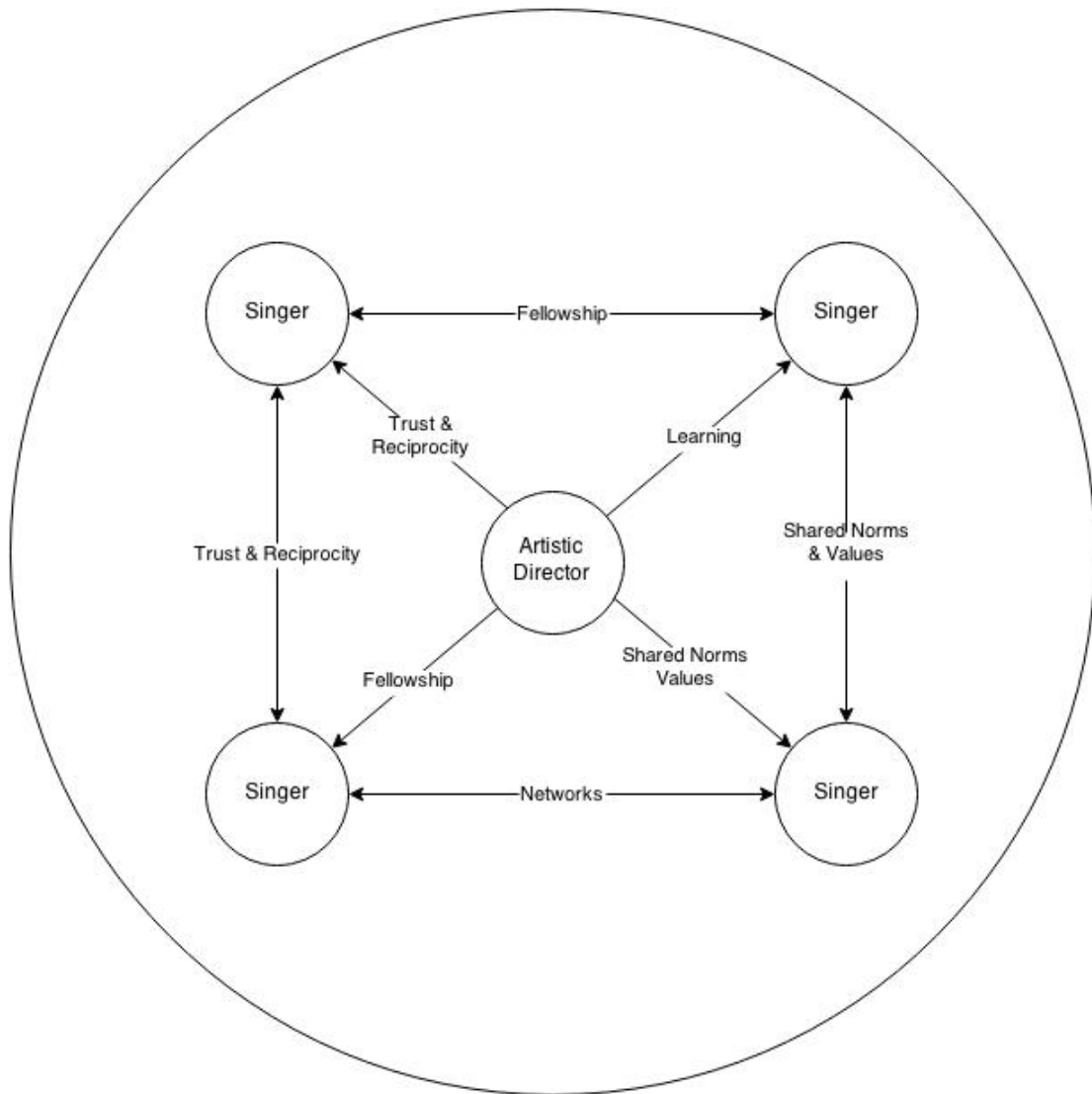


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*Figure 2.* Indicators of Linking Social Capital Between Chorus and Artistic Director

The presence of linking capital in the SMC means that the power differential has been broken down between Coleman and the chorus. The power relationship that would normally exist between leader and follower has been erased or minimized to the extent that this relationship now exists on an equal playing field (Figure 3). As a result, the chorus feels empowered to speak to Coleman about concerns, and he has the opportunity to get to know the men on a deeper level.

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*Figure 3.* Relationship Between Artistic Director and Chorus

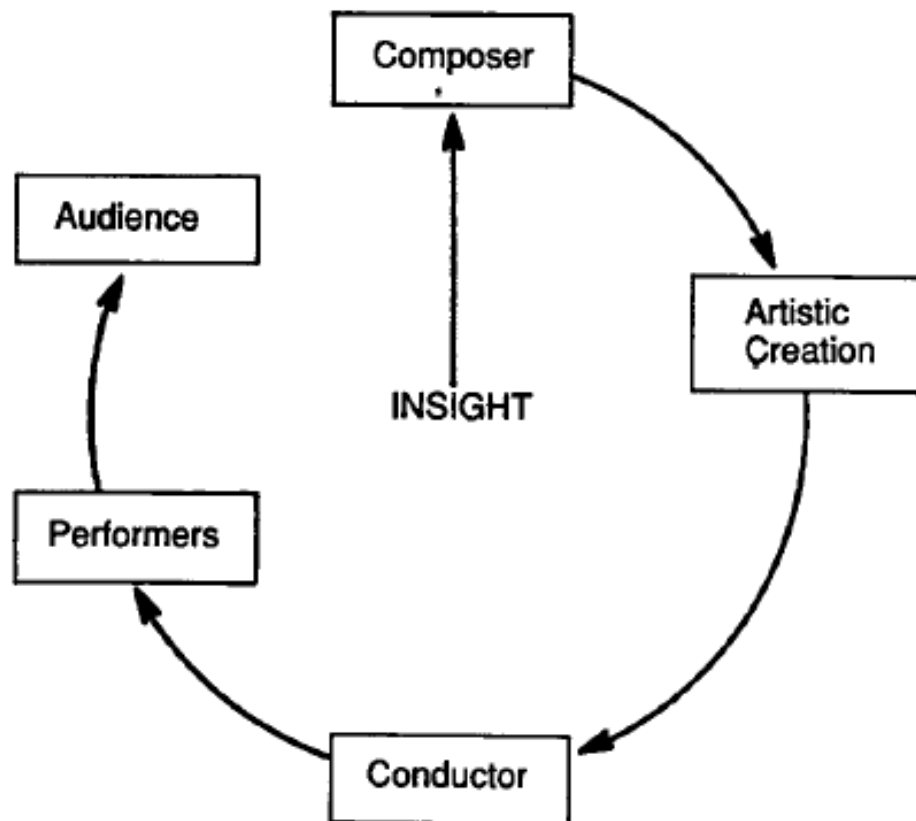
In the SMC, the presence of linking capital builds connections across the divides between director and singer, leveraging the holistic experience of the whole ensemble, but not every individual will equally experience this aspect of social capital. Even though Coleman has gone to great strides to create a connection to his chorus, there will always be people who feel differing degrees of closeness. During an informal group conversation, a singing member named Greg expressed his dissatisfaction concerning the lack of truly diverse repertoire performed by the SMC. A vocal coach who was privy to the conversation suggested he talk to Coleman. However, Greg denied having the correct connection to the artistic director to be of any influence. In his perception, no amount of talking or arguing could ever persuade Coleman to take his opinion seriously due to his status as a singer and as a person of color. In addition, he did not feel that his gifts were being used to the fullest in the chorus. After a period of reflection however, Greg decided to stay because the chorus gave him a musical outlet and a source of fellowship. Even though Greg was low on linking capital, his investment in bonding capital and its resulting payoff was great enough to bring him back to the chorus.

Other examples of conflict with the artistic director have included the following topics: the purpose and cost of touring, membership dues, the necessity of wearing red ribbons on performance attire, the cost and style of costumes, the intensity and complexity of riser choreography, and the length of rehearsals. However, the issues were resolved through personal communication, “town hall” meetings, and emails. Most disagreements were ended amicably due to the high trust and reciprocity among members.

The importance of the relationship between conductor and chorus can not be overstated. Traditionally, conducting textbooks assume a linear process of communication and musicking in

the relationship between the artistic director and performers (see Figure 4) borrowed from Decker and Kirk (1988).

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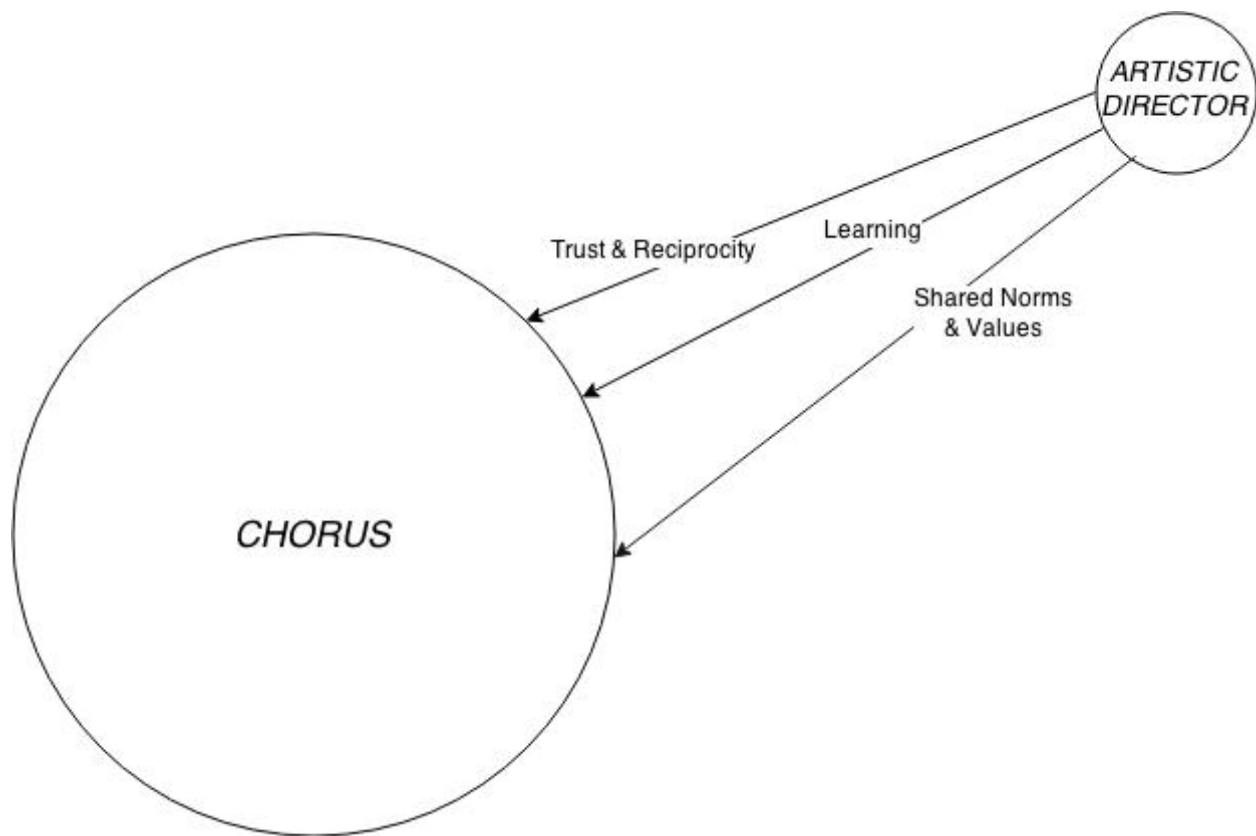


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*Figure 4.* Communication: Composer, conductor, performers, audience

In addition, such models assume a top-down leadership approach from the conductor to the chorus. Within this model, reciprocity does not seem to be present, the forming of relationships is not addressed, and the music seems to be transmitted. In this top-down approach, the composer creates a musical work or *artistic creation* that informs the conductor. The conductor transmits or communicates these ideas to the performers, who then sing *for* the audience.

Relating the Decker and Kirk (1988) model to the Linking Capital Model (Figure 2), the roles of artistic director and chorus in an average choir remain distinct. If any linking capital is present, it is merely in the transmission of information from the artistic director to the ensemble. Absent would be the presence of fellowship (as it is assumed not to be significant in the communication cycle), as well the reciprocal or responsiveness of the ensemble director (see Figure 5).



*Figure 5. Model of Linking Capital Between the Average Chorus and Artistic Director*

However, since a conductor/artistic director's vision cannot be realized without the work of her/his singers and a community choir cannot function without its conductor, it would make sense that valuing the performers and the relationship between conductor and performers might serve an organization well. In the case of the SMC, the presence of linking capital is significant. It signifies a new paradigm in which the conductor and chorus retain their unique roles while there is still a sense of both fellowship and trust and reciprocity between the groups. Coleman and the chorus are able to forge egalitarian relationships—despite differing power levels—in which each party is able to speak its mind without fear of retribution due to differing power levels.

While there are different models of conducting leadership, this research shows that a conductor-choir relationship marked by leveraging linking capital connections results in a membership that will work long hours and give of their time and talents that as necessary to put together a concert that evokes a laugh, a tear, and a chill. Other conductors might find it profitable and valuable to strengthen linking capital by leading a section to facilitate fellowship, arriving early and/or staying late to chat with members, providing small opportunities for teaching and learning to occur in rehearsal, and/or sending letters of instruction/encouragement to their members. It seems that the manifestation of linking capital in the SMC affirms the philosophy of Small (1998), particularly that the vulnerable act of musicking requires a human connection as well as musical. In addition, this research confirms Stone's (2003) premise that linking capital helps an organization to "get ahead" (p. 1). As this study illuminates, taking into account the humanity beyond the art of the composition and the performance may help leaders to develop a sustainable membership in a community arts performing organization, particularly with regards to relationships between leadership and ensemble members.

**Chorus to community: Bridging capital in the SMC.** The SMC often connects to their audiences by way of education. They seek to transform hearts and minds and set out to accomplish this in a variety of ways, but primarily by way of their performances and engagements with the larger community. In this study, this process of education or persuasion is identified as the indicator of learning and it characterizes the relationship between the SMC and the greater community. David, a vocal coach and guest conductor for the Beatles concert, spoke of this connection with the audience while emphasizing the foundational connection of members to one another (bonding capital) and to Coleman (linking capital),

The thing that made this so personally rewarding was that it was so emotionally charged. There was so much vulnerability and transparency on that stage within the people of the production or among the people of the production that it was visceral. . . There was an exchange of spirit and heart and an engagement in an artistic vision larger than any single person. And you could see that in the way that the dancers danced. You could see that in the way that the chorus breathed together the way, the way that they shaped together, and the way that they are connected with Dennis. The way that they were connected to the audience. The way that they were genuine in their expression of emotion. There was so much transparency and love that was so apparent from my angle that it was—It made it worth it. . . . I heard from several people [in the audience] that there were moments of tears and there were lots of moments of laughter.

The presence of bridging capital is significant since the differences in identity or ideology between the chorus and the audience could prevent a relational connection from forming. The existence of bridging capital means that ideological and philosophical differences have started to be resolved and the networks are starting to overlap (cf. Stone, 2003). In other words, through

learning, the chorus and audience their worldviews merge and they begin to see the world through each other's shoes. In the SMC, the social capital indicator of learning characterizes the relationship between the chorus and the audience. This indicator of learning will be explored with examples of how it was manifest in the SMC.

**Learning.** For audience members, attending an SMC concert has been an educational experience that transformed their worldview especially in the areas of human sexuality and relationships. Many chorus members have “come out” or reconciled their relationships with family members by bringing them to concerts. For example, one member's mother has become a huge advocate back in New Jersey for her gay son and another singer's work family sends a large group of people every year to support the cause and vision of the SMC. For Kevin, the bridging capital of the chorus has extended to his mother who was in the audience. He shared,

The advocacy that we've created for ourselves by having shows safe enough that I can fly my mother out from New Jersey and put her in front of the show. . .is great. . . .And then she goes back and tells somebody else and is not so hesitant to talk about *gay son* or *those pieces*.

For Kevin's mother, attending an SMC concert transformed her perception of what it means to be gay. Witnessing 300 gay men proudly singing about what they believed changed her perspective to positive.

For some, this transformation of view has been on the part of the chorus member. Chorus member Manuel was a little wary when his boss said that she was going to come to the show. He was not sure how she would react to seeing a gay men's chorus perform and seeing him on stage with them. To his surprise, she brought her children and her boss and loved the show. Six years

later, Manuel now has 20 members from work coming annually to support him at the concert; and with that comes a sense of acceptance by his peers and his superiors.

*Memorization of music.* The SMC has three guiding philosophies that have contributed to connecting with their “audience family” (SMC’s term). First, they do not use printed music in performance; rather, they memorize the music for each performance. A founding member recalled his first concert with Coleman:

The first concert we did with Dennis was from *Buckworth to Bernstein*. . . .it was cheaply reproduced and it was running south [poorly] because we were holding music. And he said it was a sign, “From now on we’re going to memorize the music.” And the result was there is not [a] barrier between us and the director.

This commitment to memorizing music changed the relationship between the music and the chorus, the chorus and the artistic director, and the chorus and the audience. From the time they receive their packet of new music, each singer knows that he will need to know the notes and text so well that it becomes a part of him.

For most members, identifying with the texts is not an issue as most of the texts are focused on the broad concepts of equality and freedom, something that they all can agree upon. When members have a challenging time connecting to the text of a piece—which is possible due to a diverse age range, a multiplicity of coming out stories, and differing sexual orientations (bisexual, transgender, and straight) in the chorus—Coleman describes the historical and social context of the piece, many times telling a story to bring a human element to the text. The result is a chorus that can identify with each other and a diverse set of repertoire on many levels.

In addition, for many of the pieces choreography is added: the piece is not only memorized, but also embodied in associated or corresponding movements or gestures. The

unified execution of these movements and/or gestures in association with the performance of the music has an enormous effect on the audience. Memorizing the music forces the men to know their music intimately; moving to the music cements connections to ideas in the music. Each individual shares a significant individual part in the whole of the music and the corresponding movement.

It is commonly accepted that at least one of the primary goals of conducting is to influence an ensemble's sound and performance by way of gestural and other nonverbal communication. The degree to which this communication may take place is influenced by the ability of the ensemble members to closely watch for the many nuances of a great conductor. For a community chorus with a vast divide in levels of music literacy, memorizing music levels the playing field and enables all performers to watch the conductor 100% of the time. The absence of printed music increases the ability of the conductor to connect profoundly with the ensemble.

Finally, the lack of a folder or binder frees the chorus to connect directly to the audience. Both literally and symbolically, the presence of a folder serves as a barrier between the humans on the stage and in the audience. Additionally, without folders, the faces of the men are more readily seen. Also, as a result of a stronger conductor-choir connection, the choir is often more communicative and visually expressive, allowing the connection between choir and audience to be even more profound.

*Concerts with a laugh, a tear, and a chill.* Second, Coleman's philosophy that every concert should possess a "laugh, tear, and a chill" has strengthened the connection between the chorus and the audience. By way of programming in this way, Coleman balances the repertoire, which encompasses fun/campy, deep/emotional, and beautiful/spiritual moments. An audience member may not appreciate all the pieces but s/he will most likely find something with which

they resonate. By giving the audience an experience engaging the full range of emotions by way of this broad set of repertoire, they feel connected to the chorus in a very intimate way, almost as if they were a part of the group through a shared experience. The men's enthusiasm on stage combined with the concert experience can be a powerful, whether the repertoire is *Hairspray* or Heggie's *For a Look or a Touch*.

However, not all efforts by the chorus to build connections with their audience have been met with purely positive results. The SMC has chosen to engage the audience on many levels with subject matter that has been at times hard to digest. During the observation period, the SMC was premiering their commission of the choral version of Jake Heggie's *For a Look or a Touch*. This mini-opera dramatizes the true love story of Gad Beck and Manfred Lewin and the persecution of homosexuals during the Holocaust. In an interview for a GALA blog by Nelson, Coleman said, "The lasting message is less about condemning the past horrors of the Third Reich and more about celebrating the personal triumph of a survivor who finally found peace with who he was and what he had overcome" (Nelson, 2014).

This type of programming was in great contrast to the prior holiday concert, which had been celebratory, and the upbeat Heartthrobs concert that was to follow. Quite a few men chose to take a leave of absence for the Jake Heggie concert because of its heavy subject matter. While this sudden dropout may be detrimental to some choruses, the SMC has a pool of committed singers great enough to maintain the whole concert season.

Former executive director Stuart Rosenthal (2011) said that the concert was also a great risk for them in terms of marketing to an audience used to lighter entertainment. In the past post concert surveys, FHP had found that those who like lighter programming dislike the heavier programming, the Classical music lovers hate the pop shows, and a range of attitudes in between.

The audience demographic tends towards “well-educated, white-collar professionals” with 49% of the audience in the age range of 35-54 (see Appendix G). FHP felt that taking the risk of this project was necessary and worthy in regards to the mission to “entertain, enlighten, unify and heal.” In the end, the audience responded favorably with 84% of the respondents rating the concert a 4 (*very good*) or 5 (*excellent*). Only three people rated the show a 1 (*very poor*) or a 2 (*poor*). What follows are some of the comments from the audience:

- *For a Look or a Touch* was totally out of place, dark, and disturbing. This piece only added to the misery of the daily news, and did nothing to bring out the feeling of renewal for Spring.
- The program fit well with the mission, but I didn’t leave feeling the usual uplifting euphoria of an SMC show.
- It was all well done, but we didn’t care for the program. We prefer lighter material.
- I thoroughly enjoyed the performance. Not only was it entertaining, it also fostered deep thought, empathy, and a desire to understand and share.
- It was one of the most moving and informative concerts we’ve ever been to, and on par with our experiences of learning about apartheid through Athol Fugard’s theater works.
- Opened my eyes to a part of history I had been totally unaware of.
- We count on the Men’s Chorus to help educate not just new concertgoers, but ourselves as well. We love when we learn new things, or new ways of looking at an issue.
- Outstanding, outrageous, provocative, beautiful, disturbing, necessary, powerful, WOW!

Even though audience members may have a negative experience, their commitment to the mission/vision of the organization usually brings them back. For as many audience members who are lost to due to a certain type of repertoire, others are gained. Coleman’s commitment to presenting a diversity of repertoire has helped to keep audience committed to the chorus—even though they may not like every concert. While not a part of this inquiry, this same repertoire was taken on a tour to Germany and Austria this past summer and was once again, well-received by nearly everyone in the audience.

The SMC’s intentional effort to connect with their audiences has been effective in bridging the differences in ideology and stylistic preferences among audience members, resulting in a growing and diverse audience. Performing a variety of literature and without music folders has been a winning combination for the SMC. While not every chorus has the time or the ability to memorize their music, it is recommended that a conductor prepare a chorus to a level that their expressions permeate the potential barrier—created by the use of a folder—between the audience and the chorus. In addition, choreography may not always be appropriate, but conductors who wish to connect more greatly with their audiences can find subtle ways to add depth to their performances. For example, an ensemble may consider singing in different standing formations, projecting images, or adding subtitles. An Alexander Technique clinic to help singers become more attuned to their bodies as conveyers of artistry could prove to be a useful way to enhance the connection between performers and audiences.

*Inclusive name.* The third philosophy is that the SMC should exist as an outreach to the entire community. From its inception, by not having the word “gay” in its name, the SMC established itself as an inclusive organization. Over time, the question of introducing the gay association into the name has been raised on several occasions. According to Artistic Director

Dennis Coleman:

In the long run we voted to leave the name as it was because that's how we were established, number one; secondly, we felt that we could do the work of changing hearts and minds around these issues quicker [*sic*] if we didn't put a restrictive title on ourselves.

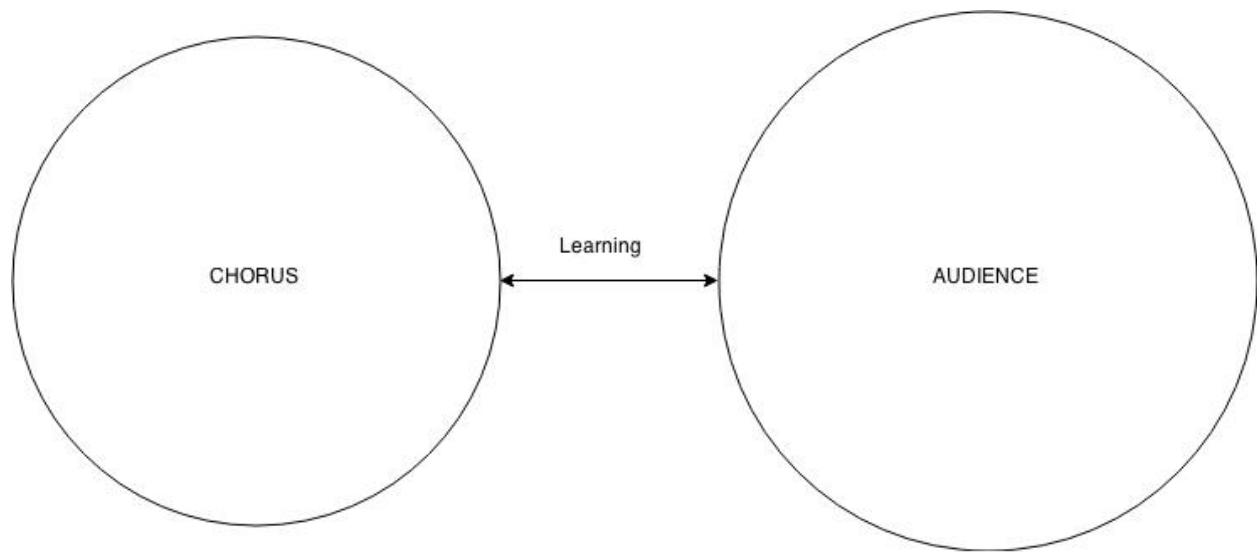
This has opened up conversations and ways for singers to bring their families to concerts. Jason shared, "They [his family]" wouldn't have [attended] if that little 'G' word had been in the label." The broadness of the name also seemed to attract a wider audience demographic. In addition, by not including the word "gay" in the name, the chorus has been able to create a welcoming place for transgender singers or transitioning singers. Matthew, the marketing director said,

The Seattle Men's Chorus has never had the word "gay" in its title. There are two sides to that, but I think it provided safety when times were a little scarier. People were able to still come and participate, either on stage or in the audience, and even though everybody likely knew it was a gay organization, the silence made it safer. Today we can be more vocal. This organization has 35 years now of building that tradition, and raising our collective voices, and I think it's really powerful.

Early in the life of the chorus, if a singer mentioned that he was part of the SMC, it was a subtle way of letting other people know he was gay. Now, it is something that the men can say they are proudly part of. Manuel shared that when he would mention at work that he was in the ensemble, coworkers would say, "That's really incredible and that's a big accomplishment that you're in the group." He went on, "I think it's really good for someone who is gay also to have that group [the SMC]. They can go see there's a huge group of people who are okay with being

gay because a lot of communities don't have that.”

*Model of bridging capital in the SMC.* The presence of bridging capital in the SMC as seen through the indicator of learning, a bidirectional process, is significant in that it signals a connection between two groups (audience and chorus) with differing ideologies and philosophies (Figure 6.).

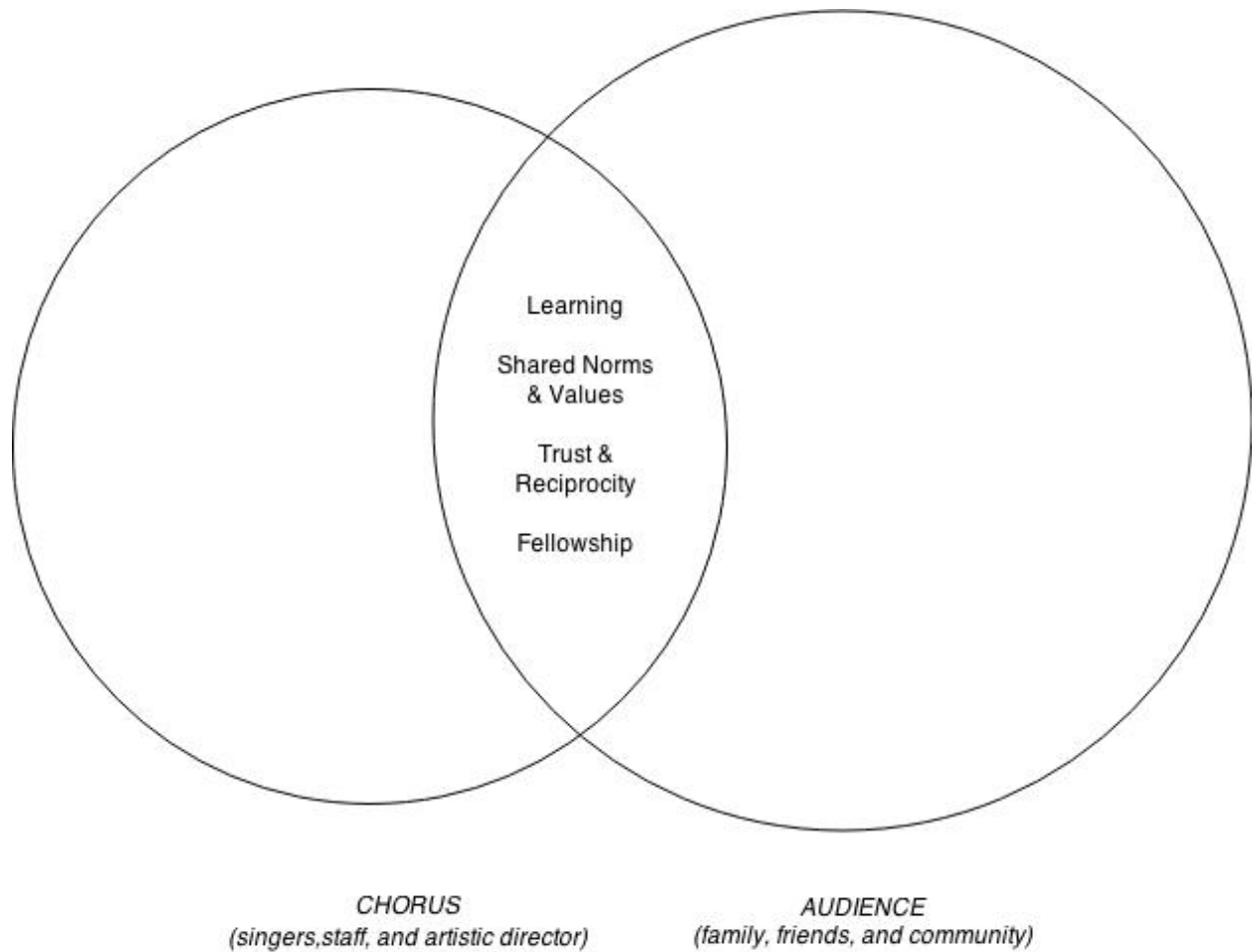


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*Figure 6.* Indicator of Bridging Capital Between Chorus and Audience

Through bridging capital, the boundaries between the chorus and audience are broken down or blurred. As a result, these boundaries start to overlap and a relationship is formed (Figure 7).

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*Figure 7. Relationship Between Chorus and Audience*

The presence of bridging capital in the SMC is important to note since many choruses have a difficult time creating connections with their audience. In addition, this study confirmed Putnam's theory that bridging capital fosters "broader identities and reciprocity" (Putnam, 2000, p. 23). Bridging capital plays a major role in the success of audience engagement, breaking down barriers with audience members, and ultimately in accomplishing the mission and vision of the chorus.

The building of bridging capital happens at all levels from the artistic director, to the development director, to the singers. Coleman is in constant contact with other organizations regarding collaborations, the development director is building relationships with area business and sponsors, and the singers are spreading the word on a grass roots level to their co-workers and community. The Holiday Show is the most popular concert and attracts the most diverse audience with 9 plus shows, bringing in an audience of 16,000 people per year. It has been billed as "Seattle's *Other* Holiday Tradition" second only to the Pacific Northwest Ballet's *Nutcracker*. One does not need to attend a chorus concert to know about the work of the Seattle Men's Chorus. The general public can see the chorus' work through television promotions, radio spots, and social media. Rehearsal clips, sneak peaks, and promos are posted on YouTube ([https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLE3kVsQxEJVZa3DRE\\_GpKV1kzXP7MvEwt](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLE3kVsQxEJVZa3DRE_GpKV1kzXP7MvEwt)) and every member of the organization is encouraged to share their experiences on Facebook. In addition, members of the community are invited to get to know the chorus through the annual fundraising black-tie dinner auction.

The SMC has been successful at building bridges with audiences that opposed their musical choices and the fact that they are a predominantly gay chorus. It is through this healing that the division between audience and chorus has begun to blur (Figure 8). For some audience members who are learning to accept the gay community, the indicator of trust and reciprocity is beginning to appear. For those audience members who are gay, they have learned that there is a community for them and the indicator of shared norms and values are developing. For audience members of any orientation, music has the power to bring a laugh, a tear, or a chill and it is through this that fellowship is created. Through outreach events and concerts featuring drama, storytelling, and dance, the chorus has bridged the gap, creating a life-long relationship that is now characteristic of bonding capital with some members. These purposeful connections have been reflective of the mission of the chorus, and supportive of the chorus.

## **Discussion**

**Transformation of Relationships in the SMC.** Part of the success of the Seattle Men's Chorus is due to its ability to leverage social capital at every level. SMC has leveraged linking capital to build a strong internal organization (Figure 8) and leveraged bridging capital to build a strong audience base (Figure 9).



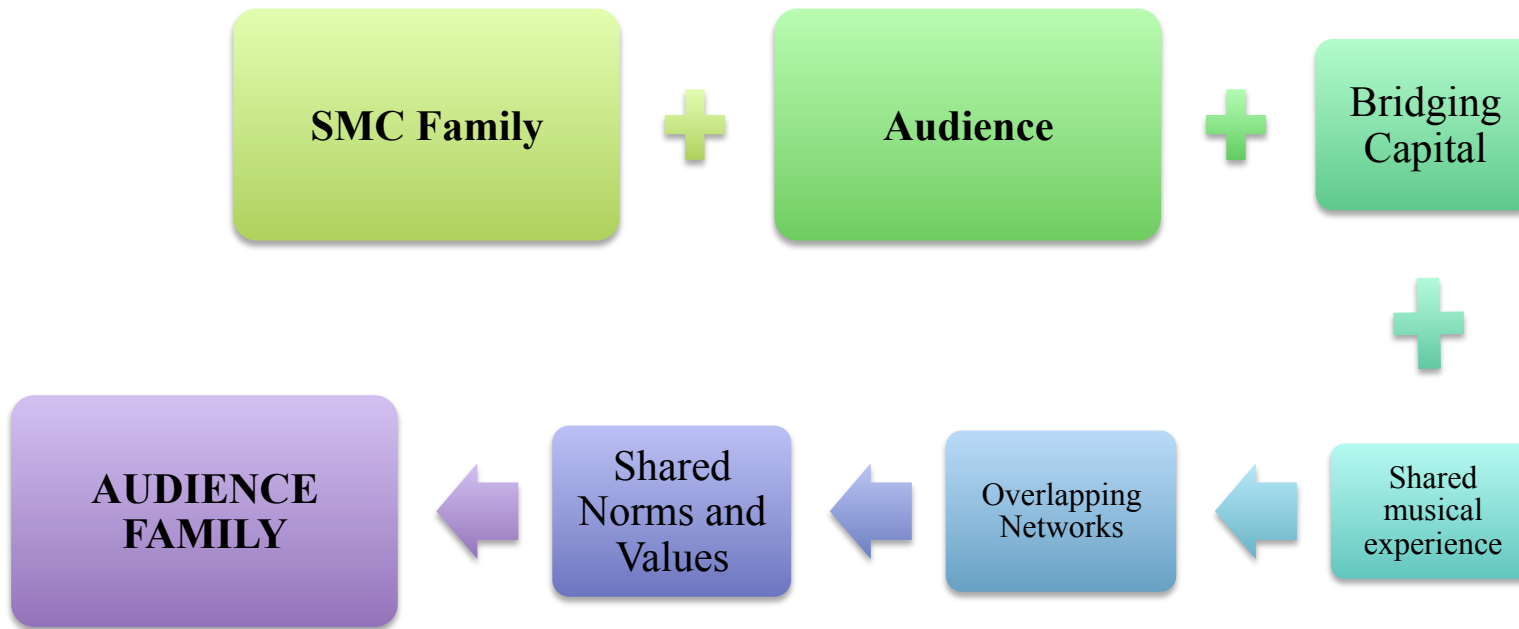


Figure 9. Transformation of Relationship Between SMC Family and Audience

The singers are empowered and transformed through the act of singing aloud their hopes, fears, dreams, and identity. Through the concerts and events, audience members are able to see a more complete picture of humanity and community, and their minds and hearts are transformed. Through these transformations in individuals, barriers crumble and relationships are built, allowing for a more sustainable organization and a more effective influence in the organization's community. In the case of the SMC, their success has been and will continue to be the advancement of their mission and vision as the relationships they build continue to grow a body of believers that "recognize the value of straight and gay people and their relationships."

In leveraging social capital and transforming relationships, the powers of music and human connection have been fused to create a more ideal community; one that promotes healing, equality, and fellowship. In other words, the relationship between Coleman and the chorus has been transformed from a hierarchical one into a horizontal one. The shared musicking experience has broken down the power differential between artistic director and chorus allowing for the presence of trust and reciprocity and the creation of a relationship more closely akin to the connections of family. Specific aspects of the shared musical experience that contributed to the transformation of relationships are listed in Table 1.

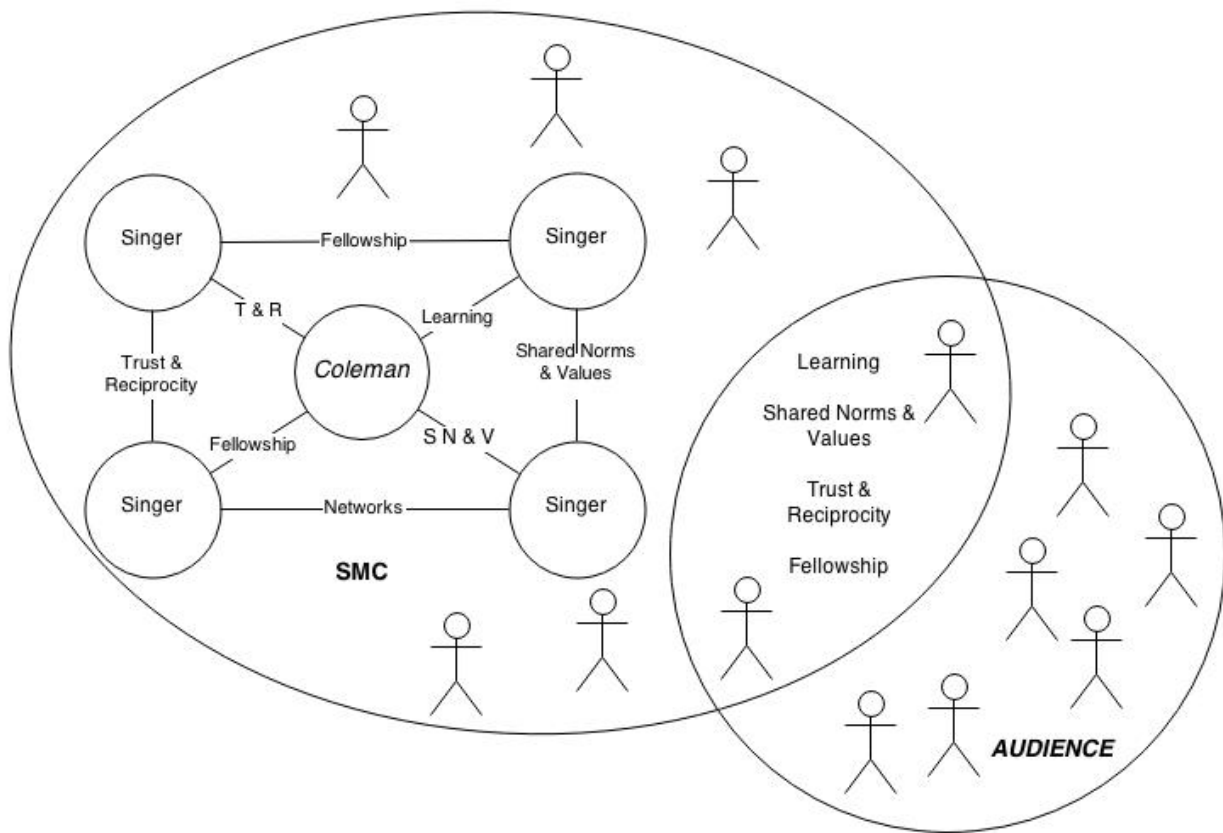
Table 1.

*Musical Catalysts to Transformation of Relationships in the SMC*

Between AD and Chorus Members	Between Chorus and Audience
Rehearsals	Concerts and Events
Approachable artistic director	Personal stories/testimonies
Positive, fun atmosphere	Repertoire with inclusive texts
Concerts and Events	Repertoire with texts that help audience members envision a more inclusive and accepting community
Pre-show reflection	
Vulnerability of singers	Programming that includes a variety of media including narration, musical interludes, choreography, visual images
Vulnerability of artistic director	
Memorization of music	Programming that connects current social justice struggles to other historical conflicts
	Memorization of music

**Chapter Summary**

This research revealed the presence of all three types of social capital in the Seattle Men’s Chorus (Figure 10).



*Figure 10. Model of Social Capital and Sets of Relationships Between the SMC and Audience*

There was a strong presence of bonding capital characterized by shared norms and values, trust and reciprocity, fellowship, and networks. Where other research studies have explored only two types of social capital (bonding and bridging), this study sought to provide a holistic view of the inner workings of a music ensemble by including the relationship between the artistic director and the ensemble, also known as linking capital. In this study, linking capital was indicated by trust and reciprocity, learning, fellowship, and shared norms and values. The collective strength of these indicators have broken down the inequalities between leadership and follower, which have allowed Coleman the added benefits of being a respected leader and a relatable human being.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly to the mission and vision of this choir, the boundaries between the chorus and the audience are starting to soften; the transformation of hearts and minds have led to reconciliation. If the chorus is a model for ideal relationships as indicated by Small (1998), then the SMC has demonstrated success not only in their size and budget, but also in their mission and vision.

## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusion, Implications, and Future Research**

#### **Conclusion**

This chapter will summarize the research, discuss the implications of this research in the field of choral music, and make suggestions for further research. The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to examine the culture of the Seattle Men's Chorus (SMC). As discussed in chapter two, an ethnographic approach consisting of interviews, observations, and the study of archival documents was utilized to gain an insider's view of the bounded culture of the SMC. In chapter three this study revealed two themes: 1) the chorus as a chosen family that provided a feeling of self-worth, friendship, and support to members regardless of sexual orientation; 2) this family as guided by Dennis Coleman, the artistic director whose decisions are informed by the ideals of social justice as stated in the mission and vision. Coleman watches out for the well-being of the chorus, knowing when to encourage, instill humor, and teach.

In further clarifying the culture of the Seattle Men's Chorus chapter 4, the following indicators of social capital were discovered to be present: 1) trust and reciprocity, 2) networks, 3) shared norms and values, 4) learning, and 5) fellowship. This current study confirms Langston's (2005) position that the newly "discovered" indicator of fellowship is one that merits further research. In addition, a dynamic model of the organizational interrelationships with the audience allowed an examination as to its health and inner workings. Upon examination of model, the unique and most important feature of the organization is its ability to transform people and ideology through the leveraging of various forms of social capital. By transforming people's hearts and minds, the SMC's mission and vision is being fulfilled and its success as an artistic organization is being realized.

## Implications for Practice

While the findings of this qualitative inquiry may not be generalizable to a general choral program or community chorus, the successes and challenges of the SMC may help choral directors and artistic directors who lead ensembles in similar contexts. In addition, it adds to the growing body of research on social capital and performance, specifically in the choral ensemble. The more that choral directors/artistic directors are aware of nonmusical elements of a choir, the better they will be prepared to meet the needs of their chorus thereby retaining members and gaining members and ultimately improving the musical quality of that performance. It is rarely—if ever—sustainable to be merely or primarily focused on repertoire; the act of making music in a choir is a social endeavor and must take into account the social needs of both singers and audiences in order to ensure long-term sustainability for the choral art.

Choral conductors may glean strategies from the success and challenges of the SMC culture. These strategies may help them assess the health and state of their own chorus especially if a focus of their choral culture has social and/or civic components. The following section examines the implications for practice in the areas of social capital; mission/vision and leadership; and repertoire.

**Social capital.** Choral directors may be interested in the social capital that has been created and cultivated by the SMC as they assess the internal working relationships between their own singers, volunteers, and staff. In the same vein as this study, they can create a map of the relationships and the resulting capital that are cultivated by their own chorus. From there, they can create a plan to further solidify certain types of social capital or endeavor to transform what they have into something more. Given the high degree of importance of fellowship, the addition of socially derived activities such as a post-rehearsal outing, retreats, group reflection times

about the performances (debriefings), and social networking groups may help to foster a greater sense of trust and reciprocity among members and leaders. The social activities may also help choruses retain and recruit members to ensembles where social connection is deemed important. For choruses who are in a director transition, especially after a founding director has left, the board may want to plan opportunities for the chorus to get to know the new director on a personal level. For choruses interested in developing a more diverse audience, they may want to consider how their concerts creates connections to issues of social justice and to the community in which they reside. Specific examples of contributing to the evidence of social capital in the SMC can be seen in Table 2. Artistic directors/conductors, board members, and communities may find these lists helpful in developing plans to advance social capital in their own contexts.

Table 2.

*Specific Examples Contributing to the Evidence of Social Capital in the SMC*

<b>Bonding Capital</b>	<b>Linking Capital</b>	<b>Bridging Capital</b>
Nametags	Member handbook	In concert
Member handbook	New member reception	Drama
Rehearsal break with snacks	Repertoire	Dance
Annual retreat	Shared musical experience (rehearsal or concert)	Choreography/Movement
Post-rehearsal gatherings	Positive, encouraging rehearsals	Sets/Staging
Singer-led community building activities	Personal stories during rehearsal related to music	Film/Audio-visuals
Social events such as cast parties, Thanksgiving dinners, socials and summer picnic	Code of conduct	Repertoire
Repertoire	Tours	Guest artists
Shared musical experience (rehearsal or concert)	Rehearsal expectations	Singing without printed music and folders
Electronic mailing lists: announcements and open forum	Chorus website	Testimonies/stories
Facebook	Section leaders	American Sign Language
Social apps	Vocal coaches	Interpreting
“Chorus Buddy” program		Audience Sing-a-longs
New member orientation		Collaborations
New member reception		Rallies
Stated core values		Singers mingling with audience at intermission and post-show
		Television broadcasts

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Committees-opportunities to lead and serve

Privileges of membership

Code of conduct

Tours

Rehearsal expectations

Newsletter

Talent show

Awards banquets

Volunteer opportunities

Section leaders

Choral festivals

Radio broadcasts

Beautiful/major performance venues

Social media teasers

Pre-show talks by community groups

Emails/videos regarding concert content before show is released

Facebook posts and photos

News coverage of concerts

Singer invitations to concerts

Performance at community events such as Christmas tree-lighting

Posters and ads

Code of conduct

Tours

Gala auction

Directors' Circle party

Pride

E-news

Mailings

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**Methods to Overcome Possible Barriers to Leveraging Social Capital.** Social capital has simultaneously strengthened the relationships in the SMC and prevented conflict that might otherwise arise. The SMC has learned how to overcome barriers to building relationships indicating that social capital is present. Some of the methods that the SMC uses to overcome possible barriers to social capital can be seen in Table 3. Artistic directors/conductors, board members, and communities may find these lists helpful in resolving conflicts or removing barriers to leveraging social capital in their own contexts.

Table 3.

*Methods the SMC uses to overcome possible barriers to leveraging social capital*

<b>Bonding</b>	<b>Linking</b>	<b>Bridging</b>
Conflict resolution guidelines (in Core Values of Member Handbook)	“Town Hall” meetings Grievance procedure	Website-contact information Personal stories
Social events such as cast parties, Thanksgiving dinners, socials and summer picnic	Option of going on leave Productivity Tool (in Member Handbook)	Audience outreach performances Pre-concert talks
Core values of fairness, respect, integrity, and caring	Artistic Director email address	Educational materials and organizations in concert lobby
Clearly stated rights and responsibilities		
Sexual harassment policy		
Grievance procedure		
Productivity tool (in Member Handbook)		
Consequences of misconduct: verbal warning, mediation, suspension, permanent expulsion		
Membership assistance program (needs-based scholarship)		
Section leader email addresses		

**Mission/vision/leadership.** Given the high sense of agreement concerning the direction of the SMC, a choral director may also consider evaluating whether their mission/vision is highly visible, supported, and followed by herself/himself, singers, and volunteers. Like the SMC, the mission/vision or strategic plan may need to be revisited and revised to reflect the changing

environment and culture of the ensemble. An artistic director/conductor who is evaluating her own work may find it fruitful to examine her commitment to and embodiment of the vision. In addition, choruses who are seeking a new artistic director may be wise to investigate a potential candidate's alignment and embodiment of the mission/vision. This may prove to be a huge factor in the success of the leadership transition and future work of the organization.

**Repertoire.** Given the SMC's consistently large choruses and audiences, choral directors who want to create connections with audiences may want to consider how their programming evokes an emotional response or connection, especially since today's audiences want engaging experiences. The addition of personal stories, sing-a-longs, and participatory experiences may help build and more fully engage their audiences. Like the SMC, choruses may consider commissioning works by composers, such as Menotti and Corigliano, that would bring out not only the best in the ensemble, but also distinct and intentional messages to the audiences they are serving.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Future research should continue to investigate the presence of social capital in music ensembles in a diversity of settings. This study revealed a strong volunteer culture in which volunteers seemed to possess a clear sense of belonging to the ensemble. Future research might also look for indicators of social capital among the volunteers, organizational leadership, and the artistic team. There is a plethora of qualified choral conductors and artistic directors but community choruses still struggle to find their niche. In addition, choral directors are trained to address musical issues more than social dynamics. A social capital analysis will aid choral directors in addressing the social needs that are inherent in many choruses, as well as to create programming that engages audience support. An analysis of the varying levels and types of

social capital present in a given ensemble would give choral directors another tool to assess their choral communities in order to better meet their needs. In addition, the ability to compare the types of social capital and the strategies used to create and maintain a healthy balance of social capital would be helpful in creating paradigms for successful choruses in a shifting culture.

While this study focused on a gay men's community chorus in the United States, future research may take a similar approach with mixed choruses, women's choruses, choirs of different sexual orientations, and professional choruses. This vein of research would help reveal the influence of context on the meaning of musicking, especially in an art form that only requires the human voice. It would especially be helpful to study choruses in countries with a stronger heritage of community musicking such as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to examine how their historical/cultural context strengthens the social capital within a choral community.

This present study is the first to examine through an ethnographic lens the culture of a GALA chorus. Its findings may prove to be a useful tool to the GALA community especially with the rise of new choruses within its ranks and a steady stream of job openings and revolving doors among the leadership in many GALA choruses. In addition, research into the women's choruses in the GALA movement, especially the Seattle Women's Chorus, would offer a valuable insight into the other half of the GALA choral community. Further ethnographic research into the founding GALA Choruses may also provide the necessary groundwork to help the GALA movement move forward in the present culture that is more accepting of gay, lesbians, intersex, and bisexuals. This research may also inform other choruses and other arts organizations (theater, dance, etc.) especially those with a social mission to find footing and success beyond their own internal culture.

While outside the scope of this study, many members that joined early in the tenure of the Seattle Men's Chorus mentioned the chorus as a support group during the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Future research focusing on the role of chorus in the HIV/AIDS advocacy movement may reveal an important chapter in the HIV/AIDS timeline and the impact that singing in a choral ensemble had on healing, HIV/AIDS prevention/health issues, and the cultural stigma that accompanied it.

In addition, I observed the presence of technology aiding in the communication between members, member to conductor, leadership to ensemble, and ensemble to the community. The use of social media apps (e.g., Facebook, Scruff, and Grindr) facilitates a type of bonding ritual that is currently hard to measure and to determine its impact. However, one cannot discount its role in human connection, especially in the SMC.

This ethnography sheds light on the culture of a highly successful men's chorus in the United States. While acknowledging that all culture is dynamic, I hope that this portrait of the SMC provides strategies for creating or maintaining a healthy choral culture and inspires the choral community to always seek to break down the barriers through the musicking process, thereby creating meaningful connections and highly engaging, sustainable partnerships among performers, audience, and the art.

## Postlude

It has been 18 months since I have been backstage with the SMC. The volunteer checking ID badges waves me into Benaroya Hall through the artists' entrance. As I ride the elevator to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor to the backstage area I feel a mounting anticipation to once again experience the ritual of the SMC Holiday Concert. I am excited to share with my SMC brothers that my research telling their stories is being well received. I walk on to the stage where the men are practicing choreography under the watchful eye of Coleman and I am overcome with an overall sense of profound gratefulness to have been accepted into the SMC Family.

Looking into the eyes of all the men, I now realize that my heart and mind has been transformed through my study of the SMC. I set out to explore the culture of the largest community chorus in North America. In doing so I have gained a greater appreciation for the power of music to change lives. In addition, we are no longer strangers. I am part of the SMC Family, and with that comes the support and friendship of 300 men. How a straight woman managed to invoke bridging capital with 300 gay men is another story worth telling but for now what is important is that my life has been transformed for the better through my experience with the SMC.

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## **Appendix A**

### Interview Guide

## Interview Guide

1. How did you first learn about the Seattle Men's Chorus?
2. Why did you join the SMC?
3. Why do you remain a part of the SMC organization?
4. What is your musical background?
5. When did you join the SMC?
6. Do you remember your first show? What was memorable about it?
7. Can you share with me significant moments in being a part of the SMC?
8. What is unique about the SMC?
9. How long do you intend to participate?
10. What do you think has contributed towards the success of the chorus?

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Consent Form**

**CONSENT FORM**

**The Culture of a Singing Community:  
An Ethnography of the Seattle Men's Chorus**

**Researcher:**

Wendy Moy, Doctoral Candidate, Choral Music, (206) 200-0806

**Faculty Advisors:**

Dr. Geoffrey Boers, Choral Music, Dr. Patricia Campbell, Ethnomusicology/Music Education

**Researcher's statement**

Dear Seattle Men's Chorus,

You are being invited to be a part of a research study. I am currently completing a Doctoral of Musical Arts in Conducting at the University of Washington. Part of my degree requires me to complete a final dissertation document. I have chosen to observe the Seattle Men's Chorus and investigate the components of its success.

The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the project is to examine the culture of the Seattle Men's Chorus with particular attention to the factors that contribute to the success of the chorus.

**STUDY PROCEDURES**

To gather data,

- I will take handwritten notes from rehearsal observations.
- I will interview members, staff, and volunteers regarding their experience. Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes. A request for a follow-up interview may be requested.
- With permission, the interviews will be audio recorded. Participants will be assigned a number and not referred to by name on the recording.
- You may choose to not answer any question or item in any questionnaire or interview.
- There are no costs associated with participation in this study.

**BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

A benefit of this study will be recommendations to the choral profession regarding best practices for the profession. It will help inform our understanding and improve the choral culture in the United States.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION**

No data will pass beyond the scope of this study and the identities of the participants will not be disclosed. All of the information you provide will be confidential. However, if we learn that you intend to harm yourself or others, we must report that to the authorities.

**OTHER INFORMATION**

You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time.

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Printed name of study staff obtaining consent	Signature	Date
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Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, I can ask one of the researchers listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

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Printed name of subject	Signature of subject	Date
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When subject is not able to provide informed consent:

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Printed name of representative	Signature of representative	Date
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Copies to:    Researcher  
                  Subject

## **Appendix C**

### **Collaborations With Guest Artists**

**Collaborations With Guest Artists**  
(representative)

**Authors**

Dr. Maya Angelou  
Judith Martin (Miss Manners)  
Armistead Maupin

**Classical**

Chanticleer  
David Higgs, organ  
Marni Nixon  
Tatiana Troyanos, soprano  
Frederica Von Stade, soprano

**Comedians**

Harvey Fierstein  
Ana Gasteyer  
Julie Halstead  
Leslie Jordan

**Dance**

Mark Morris Dance Group  
Donald Byrd, choreographer

**Jazz**

Diane Schuur

**Popular Culture**

Betty Buckley  
Ann Hampton Callaway  
Liz Callaway  
Nell Carter  
Kristin Chenoweth  
Natalie Cole  
Judy Collins  
Rosemary Clooney  
Michael Feinstein  
Lesley Gore  
Megan Hilty  
Levi Kreis  
Lucy Lawless  
Melissa Manchester  
Vicci Martinez  
Megan Mullally  
Bobby McFerrin  
Kathy Najimi  
Faith Prince  
Debbie Reynolds  
Jim Verraros  
Ann Wilson  
Chely Wright

## **Appendix D**

### **Seattle Men's Chorus Major Commissions and Premieres**

## Seattle Men's Chorus Major Commissions and Premieres

Composer	Title	Year	Notes
Bourland, Roger	<i>Flashpoint/Stonewall</i>	1994	Male Chorus and Synthesizers
Conte, David	<i>Christmas Intrada</i>	1997	
Corigliano, John	<i>Of Rage and Remembrance</i>	1991	Male Chorus & Soloists; Cellos & Piano Written as companion piece to Symphony No. 1
Crandall, Kelly	<i>Forn Jól (Ancient Yule)</i>	2005	
Diamond, David	<i>Why?</i>	1992	Male Chorus Piano 4 poems of Blake
Gjeilo, Ola	<i>New Year's Carol</i>	2014	Male chorus Piano
Hatfield, Stephen	<i>Out of Water, Into Air</i>	1998	
Hawley, William	<i>Five Shelley Settings</i>	1992	Male Chorus a cappella
Heggie, Jake	<i>Anna Madrigal Remembers</i>	2004	Male Chorus Strings version Original a cappella version for Chanticleer
Heggie, Jake	<i>For a Look or a Touch</i>	2013	Extended version for actor, baritone male chorus, violin, flute, clarinet, cello and piano; Original commissioned by Music of Remembrance

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Herbolsheimer, Bern	<i>Songs and Dances of Sophocles</i>	1984	
Jennings, Joseph	<i>Harambee (Call to Unity)</i>	1998	a cappella
Menotti, Gian Carlo	<i>My Christmas</i>	1987	Male Chorus Instrumental Ensemble
Moran, Robert	<i>Night Passage</i>	1995	Choral Opera for Male Chorus and Strings
Parker, Alice	<i>Roll Round with the Year</i>	1989	Male Chorus Guitar
Susa, Conrad	<i>It Came Upon a Midnight Clear – A Christmas Reverie</i>	n.d.	
Susa, Conrad	<i>The Cricket Sings</i>	1985	Male Chorus Brass & Percussion 5-movement setting of poetry of Garcia Lorca

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## **Appendix E**

### **GALA Chorus Collaborations**

**GALA Chorus Collaborations**  
(representative)

New York City Gay Men's Chorus

Turtle Creek Chorale

Gay Men's Chorus of Washington DC

Boston Gay Men's Chorus

Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles

Chanticleer

San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus

Portland Gay Men's Chorus

Vancouver Men's Chorus, Vancouver, BC

Aurora Chorus, Portland, OR

## **Appendix F**

### Seattle Men's Chorus Recordings

## Seattle Men's Chorus Recordings

Title	Year	Description	Playlist
Bustin' Out All Over	1999	<p>Rodgers &amp; Hammerstein wrote the music and lyrics for some of America's best-loved Broadway musicals including <i>The King and I</i>, <i>Carousel</i>, <i>The Sound of Music</i>, <i>State Fair</i> and <i>South Pacific</i>. Last year, Seattle Men's Chorus took on the classics by this venerable duo, gave their music the characteristic Seattle Men's Chorus flair, and wowed audiences.</p> <p>This is the first time the Rodgers &amp; Hammerstein Organization gave its permission to a gay chorus to arrange and record these classics. Old favorites like <i>If I Loved You</i> from <i>Carousel</i>, <i>My Favorite Things</i> from <i>The Sound of Music</i> and <i>We Kiss In A Shadow</i> from <i>The King and I</i> take on new meaning when sung by the proud men of Seattle Men's Chorus.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do Re Mi</li> <li>2. South Pacific</li> <li>3. Stepsister's Lament</li> <li>4. If I Loved You</li> <li>5. An Ordinary Couple</li> <li>6. My Favorite Things</li> <li>7. We Kiss In A Shadow</li> <li>8. Oklahoma!</li> <li>9. Hello Young Lovers</li> <li>10. You've Got To Be Taught</li> <li>11. The Sound Of Music</li> <li>12. You'll Never Walk Alone</li> </ol>
Captured Live!	1995	<p>There's nothing like being in the audience at a Seattle Men's Chorus Holiday Concert. This recording puts you in a center seat as chorus members speak about their personal holiday memories and sing great music like <i>A Season For Lovers</i> and <i>O Little Town of Bethlehem</i>. Stephen Sondheim's classic <i>Children Will Listen</i> features the voices of two children reading memories written by chorus men about their parents. A must for anyone who wants to experience the magic and joy of a Seattle Men's Chorus concert.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Home for the Holidays</li> <li>2. Christmas is Delicious</li> <li>3. O Little Town of Bethlehem</li> <li>4. Riu, Riu, Chiu</li> <li>5. The Praise of Christmas</li> <li>6. Yuletide Fires</li> <li>7. The Long Christmas Dinner</li> <li>8. A Minnesota Boy Discovers True Love</li> <li>9. A Season for Lovers</li> <li>10. Kwaanza</li> <li>11. Seven Principles</li> <li>12. Music of Hanukkah</li> <li>13. My Grandfather Would Say</li> <li>14. Mi Zeh Y'maleil</li> <li>15. Christmas Is For</li> </ol>

			Children 16. Children Will Listen 17. Keep Christmas In Your Heart
Fruit of the Month Club	2001	Captain Smartypants and Zipper, two remarkable ensembles from Seattle Men's Chorus, team together to sing original songs by Eric Lane Barnes. Eric produces hits that have electrified audiences. Now you can own a piece of these works of art. Included on the recording are audience favorites such as <i>Parking Spot</i> , <i>Available</i> and <i>When You Meet An Angel</i> along with brand-new, stunning originals.	1. Flying Dreams 2. Love Don't Be A Stranger 3. Garbage 4. Available 5. Mood Vertigo 6. Shave and a Haircut 7. Parking Spot 8. Fairy Tales 9. The Fundamental 10. The Letter Song 11. When You Meet An Angel 12. Love Rain Down 13. Fruit Cocktail
Holiday Traditions	1993	The second Seattle Men's Chorus holiday recording features a driving gospel version of <i>Go Tell It On the Mountain</i> , and the Nigerian carol <i>Betelehemu</i> plus favorites like <i>God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen</i> , <i>Carol of the Bells</i> , <i>Do You Hear What I Hear?</i> and <i>What Child Is This?</i>	1. Flying Dreams 2. Love Don't Be A Stranger 3. Garbage 4. Available 5. Mood Vertigo 6. Shave and a Haircut 7. Parking Spot 8. Fairy Tales 9. The Fundamental 10. The Letter Song 11. When You Meet An Angel 12. Love Rain Down 13. Fruit Cocktail
Home	2000	Seattle Men's Chorus' 10th CD release features one of the most requested pieces the chorus has ever performed — <i>Michael's Letter to Mama</i> from Seattle Men's Chorus' groundbreaking collaboration with Armistead Maupin, author of the beloved <i>Tales of the City</i> series.	1. Michael's Letter to Mama 2. Home 3. Welcome Home 4. Keepers of the Light

		Seattle Men's Chorus ensembles Zipper and Captain Smartypants make appearances on this four-song recording which includes <i>Home</i> from The Wiz, <i>Welcome Home</i> and <i>Keepers of the Light</i> .	
Joy!	2001	On this cd, you will find a wide variety of music and styles. From the sweet sound of <i>Silver Bells</i> to the rousing gospel chorus in <i>Soulful Hallelujah</i> . <i>Over the Skies of Yisrael</i> , a Hanukkah piece commissioned by Seattle Men's Chorus is here too, along with several favorite carols and an appearance by Zipper! and Captain Smartypants.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Silver Bells</li> <li>2. The River and Through the Woods</li> <li>3. Personent Hodie</li> <li>4. Bittersweet Tango</li> <li>5. Are You Burning, Little Candle?</li> <li>6. Boogie Woogie Hanukkah</li> <li>7. The Truth About Christmas</li> <li>8. Christmas Intrada</li> <li>9. Over the Skies of Yisrael</li> <li>10. Santa Claus is Comin' to Town</li> <li>11. Together</li> <li>12. Eya Ache</li> <li>13. Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas</li> <li>14. Good King Wenceslas</li> <li>15. The Bells of Christmas</li> <li>16. Soulful Hallelujah</li> <li>17. Joy!</li> </ol>
Over the Rainbow!	2000	<p>The first Seattle Men's Chorus recording, remastered and improved upon for the re-release! A timeless collection including jazz standards <i>Mood Indigo</i> and <i>Hit Me With A Hot Note</i> by Duke Ellington; Holly Near's classic <i>The Great Peace March</i>; <i>Family</i> from <i>Dreamgirls</i>; and <i>Mr. Sandman</i>.</p> <p>In addition, Seattle Men's Chorus' Artistic Director Dennis Coleman added the blissful recording of <i>Ave Maria</i> from Seattle Men's Chorus' first Holiday concert at Benaroya Hall and <i>Old Friend</i> from <i>Tunes From Tales</i>:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Diversity</li> <li>2. Welcome! Sing, Be Merry!</li> <li>3. Ching-A-Ring Chaw</li> <li>4. At The River</li> <li>5. Zion's Walls</li> <li>6. Ave Maria</li> <li>7. Ring Out, Wild Bells</li> <li>8. Eulogy</li> <li>9. Not While I'm Around</li> <li>10. Hit Me With A Hot Note</li> <li>11. Mood Indigo</li> <li>12. Mr. Sandman</li> <li>13. The Great Peace</li> </ol>

		<p><i>Music For Mouse</i>, Seattle Men's Chorus' smash collaboration with author Armistead Maupin.</p>	<p>March 14. Old Friend 15. Family 16. Over The Rainbow 17. A Parting Blessing</p>
The Pink Album	1996	<p>This recording offers our renditions of some of the songs that have been important to the lesbian and gay movement in the past two decades.</p> <p>Joining us are four of our favorite guests: Harvey Fierstein in a disco version of <i>I Am What I Am</i>, Holly Near in <i>The Great Peace March</i>, Ann Hampton Callaway in <i>Let Me Be the Music</i>, and Diane Schuur in an unforgettable version of <i>Over the Rainbow</i>. Ladies Don't Drum, a Seattle-based percussion ensemble, adds rhythmic fervor on several cuts.</p>	<p>1. Ain't No Turnin' Back 2. There Comes A Time 3. Finally Here 4. I Am What I Am 5. Something Inside So Strong 6. Ella's Song 7. Do Not Weep 8. Over The Rainbow 9. Wanting Memories 10. Our Love Is Soaring 11. Love Don't Need A Reason 12. As I Remember Him 13. Eulogy 14. Let Me Be The Music 15. The Great Peace March 16. Let Evening Come 17. You Are The New Day 18. Behold The Hills Of Tomorrow 19. We Shall Overcome</p>
Silver Bells	2003	<p>Seattle Men's Chorus Artistic Director Dennis Coleman has chosen a collection of 20 songs that includes only songs that are, in fact, audience favorites, including the title track <i>Silver Bells</i>, plus <i>God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen</i>, <i>White Christmas</i> and many others!</p> <p>Comprised of tunes from all four of the previous Seattle Men's Chorus Holiday CDs, <i>Silver Bells</i> is the perfect recording to own if you are only going to have one seasonal recording and a must-have for every audiophile's holiday catalog. It's the</p>	<p>1. Silver Bells 2. Christmas Trilogy 3. A Jubilant Gloria 4. We Wish You A Merry Christmas 5. In The Bleak Midwinter 6. Over The River And Through The Woods 7. Carol Of The Bells 8. Snowfall 9. Hard Candy Christmas 10. O Little Town Of Bethlehem 11. O Tannenbaum 12. Santa Claus Is Comin' To Town</p>

perfect way to honor the 25th Anniversary of Seattle Men's Chorus!

13. Boogie Woogie Hanukkah
14. Jingle Bells
15. Do You Hear What I Hear?
16. Good King Wenceslas
17. The Christmas Song
18. White Christmas
19. Peace, Peace / Silent Night / Still, Still, Still
20. Christmas Comes Anew

Snowbound

1998

One of Seattle Men's Chorus' most powerful concerts to date, this two-disc recording captures the essence of what many consider to be the chorus' finest hour. Joined by Northwest Girlchoir, Total Experience Gospel Choir, and Urban Rhythms - three of the nation's finest gospel and singing ensembles - the recording brings some of the greatest inspirational favorites to life including: *We Shall Not Be Moved*, *There's a Man Goin' Round*, *Still I Rise* and a medley from the Broadway musical *Ain't Misbehavin'*.

1. Christmas Comes Anew
2. We Wish You A Merry Christmas
3. The Christmas Song
4. Snowfall
5. Christmas Cantata
6. Ding Dong! Merrily On High
7. Jingle Bells
8. The Twelve Days Of Christmas
9. Carol From An Irish Cabin
10. Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind
11. Hard Candy Christmas
12. Still, Still, Still
13. The Chanticleer's Carol
14. White Christmas
15. Peace, Peace / Silent Night
16. A Jubilant Gloria

Soul Full

1991

This best-selling Holiday album features Seattle Men's Chorus with a brass ensemble and backed by the awesome sound of a pipe organ.

Holiday favorites include songs such as *The Christmas Song* (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire), *Hard Candy Christmas*, *Silent Night*, and *White Christmas*.

Disc One

1. Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around
2. We Shall Not Be Moved
3. There's A Man Goin' Round
4. A Quiet Place
5. Still I Rise

6. Betelehemu
7. Psalm 23
8. O Sifuni Mungu (All Creatures of Our God and King)
9. Don't Get Down On Your Knees To Pray Until you Have Forgiven Everyone
10. Out Of Water, Into Air

Disc Two

1. Precious Lord
2. Thou My Everlasting Portion
3. Mood Indigo
4. Heaven Bound Train
5. Ain't Misbehavin' Medley
6. Freeway Of Love
7. Respect
8. The Lord's Prayer
9. Lean On Me
10. Don't Wait 'Til The Battle Is Over
11. Hallelujah
12. Lift Every Voice And Sing
13. We Shall Overcome

Swellegant  
Elegance

1993

Seattle Men's Chorus and Philandros, a close-harmony ensemble of Seattle Men's Chorus, present the music of Cole Porter in Swellegant Elegance. This performance brings a fresh, witty and romantic look at 31 classic Cole Porter tunes. Includes: *I Get a Kick Out of You*, *Miss Otis Regrets*, *I've Got You Under My Skin*, and *Blow Gabriel, Blow*.

1. Anything Goes
2. Cole On Broadway
3. Cole In Society
4. Cole In Love
5. Opening Act II
6. At Long Last Love
7. Cole By Night
8. Cole In Hollywood
9. Wouldn't It Be Fun
10. Finale
11. Find Me A Primitive Man
12. Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye

UnderCover	2004	<p>Seattle Men's Chorus assistant artistic director Eric Lane Barnes and Captain Smarty pants have put together a CD that you'll want to add to your music collection. UnderCover features covers of songs made popular by Elton John, Joni Mitchell, Petula Clark, Rufus Wainwright, Bill Withers, James Taylor, Sonny and Cher and many others. You'll be humming along to such great tunes as <i>Big Yellow Taxi</i>, <i>Killing Me Softly</i>, <i>Fernando</i>, <i>Suddenly Seymour</i> and <i>Xanadu</i>. This CD is sure to become one of your favorites.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Drift Away</li> <li>2. Big Yellow Taxi</li> <li>3. This Boy</li> <li>4. Use Me</li> <li>5. Killing Me Softly</li> <li>6. Downtown</li> <li>7. Suddenly Seymour</li> <li>8. Fernando</li> <li>9. Fire and Rain</li> <li>10. Vibrate</li> <li>11. I Want Love</li> <li>12. Hallelujah</li> <li>13. Believe / I Got You / The Beat Goes On</li> <li>14. Xanadu</li> <li>15. Vitamin Q</li> </ol>
We Are Family	1993	<p>Seattle Men's Chorus electrified audiences in June 1997 with <i>We Are Family</i>, a fun-filled musical trip back to the seventies. Classic soft rock songs by Elton John and the Carpenters, a hilarious spoof of the Brady Bunch, a salute to the great disco divas, and all of the music and the spirit of the "Me" decade.</p> <p>On this recording you will find more than 50 songs from the show, including such classics as <i>I Believe In Music</i>, <i>Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head</i>, <i>Stayin' Alive</i>, <i>Funkytown</i> and <i>Afternoon Delight</i>.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I Believe In Music</li> <li>2. Have A Nice Day</li> <li>3. Seventies Moment One</li> <li>4. Re-Runs</li> <li>5. Elton</li> <li>6. Happy Days</li> <li>7. Seventies Moment Two</li> <li>8. Seventies Kinda Love</li> <li>9. Dancing Queens</li> <li>10. Oh What A Night</li> <li>11. Karen</li> <li>12. Love In The Afternoon</li> <li>13. Family Values</li> <li>14. YMCA</li> <li>15. It Takes A Village</li> </ol>

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## **Appendix G**

### Audience Demographics

## Audience Demographics

### AGE

18 - 34 . . . . .	9%
35 - 54 . . . . .	49%
55 - 64 . . . . .	26%
65 - 75+ . . . . .	16%
.	

### GENDER

Male . . . . .	60%
.	
Female . . . . .	40%
.	

### INCOME LEVELS

\$0 - 49.9K . . . . .	15%
.	
\$51 - 99.9K . . . . .	42%
\$100 - 149.9K . . . . .	30%
\$150 - 250K . . . . .	13%
.	

### HOME OWNERSHIP

Renters . . . . .	23%
.	
Owners . . . . .	77%
.	

### EDUCATION / OCCUPATION

Audience is well-educated, white-collar professionals.  
 Job categories with an index higher than 100 are:

Lawyers / Judges . . . . .	443
Doctors . . . . .	398
.	
Teachers / Librarians . . . . .	287
Administrative / Managerial . . . . .	236
Farm . . . . .	176
.	
Professional / Technical . . . . .	160
Management . . . . .	138
Sales / Service . . . . .	103

### ACTIVE LIFESTYLES

SMC|SWC Audience lead active lifestyles in higher than average scores in a variety of self-reported categories. The highest indexes (7.0% out of 8.0%) are:

- Cultural** Collectibles/Collections, Crafts, Art/Antique Collecting, Cultural/Arts Events, Foreign Travel
- Domestic** Sewing, Needlework/Knitting, Crafts, Gourmet Cooking/Fine Foods, Gardening, Home Workshop, House Plants, Book Reading.
- Fitness** Physical Fitness/Exercise, Running/Jogging/Bicycling, Self Improvement
- Good Life** Gourmet Cooking/Fine Foods, Home Furnishing/Decorating, Cultural/ Arts Events, Health/Natural, Fashion Clothing, Foreign Travel, Wines

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<https://www.flyinghouse.org/publications/advertising/profiles.asp>

## Appendix H

Lyrics to *Michael's Letter to Mama*

## Lyrics from *Michael's Letter to Mama*

From Armistead Maupin's San Francisco Chronicle serial *More Tales from the City*  
Music by David Maddux

Dear Mama,

I'm sorry it's taken me so long to write. Every time I try to write to you and Papa I realize I'm not saying the things that are in my heart. That would be O.K., if I loved you any less than I do, but you are still my parents and I am still your child.

I have friends who think I'm foolish to write this letter. I hope they're wrong. I hope their doubts are based on parents who loved and trusted them less than mine do. I hope especially that you'll see this as an act of love on my part, a sign of my continuing need to share my life with you. I wouldn't have written, I guess, if you hadn't told me about your involvement in the Save Our Children campaign. That, more than anything, made it clear that my responsibility was to tell you the truth, that your own child is homosexual, and that I never needed saving from anything except the cruel and ignorant piety of people like Anita Bryant.

I'm sorry, Mama. Not for what I am, but for how you must feel at this moment. I know what that feeling is, for I felt it for most of my life. Revulsion, shame, disbelief – rejection through fear of something I knew, even as a child, was as basic to my nature as the color of my eyes.

No, Mama, I wasn't "recruited." No seasoned homosexual ever served as my mentor. But you know what? I wish someone had. I wish someone older than me and wiser than the people in Orlando had taken me aside and said, "You're all right, kid. You can grow up to be a doctor or a teacher just like anyone else. You're not crazy or sick or evil. You can succeed and be happy and find peace with friends – all kinds of friends – who don't give a damn who you go to bed with. Most of all, though, you can love and be loved, without hating yourself for it."

But no one ever said that to me, Mama. I had to find it out on my own, with the help of the city that has become my home. I know this may be hard for you to believe, but San Francisco is full of men and women, both straight and gay, who don't consider sexuality in measuring the worth of another human being.

These aren't radicals or weirdos, Mama. They are shop clerks and bankers and little old ladies and people who nod and smile to you when you meet them on the bus. Their attitude is neither patronizing nor pitying. And their message is so simple: Yes, you are a person. Yes, I like you. Yes, it's all right for you to like me, too.

I know what you must be thinking now. You're asking yourself: What did we do wrong? How did we let this happen? Which one of us made him that way?

I can't answer that, Mama. In the long run, I guess I really don't care. All I know is this: If you and Papa are responsible for the way I am, then I thank you with all my heart, for it's the light and the joy of my life.

I know I can't tell you what it is to be gay. But I can tell you what it's not.

It's not hiding behind words, Mama. Like family and decency and Christianity. It's not fearing your body, or the pleasures that God made for it. It's not judging your neighbor, except when he's crass or unkind.

Being gay has taught me tolerance, compassion and humility. It has shown me the limitless possibilities of living. It has given me people whose passion and kindness and sensitivity have provided a constant source of strength. It has brought me into the family of man, Mama, and I like it here. I like it.

There's not much else I can say, except that I'm the same Michael you've always known. You just know me better now. I have never consciously done anything to hurt you. I never will.

Please don't feel you have to answer this right away. It's enough for me to know that I no longer have to lie to the people who taught me to value the truth.

Mary Ann sends her love.

Everything is fine at 28 Barbary Lane.

Your loving son,

*Michael*

[www.ArmisteadMaupin.com](http://www.ArmisteadMaupin.com)

## **Appendix I**

Thank You Letter to SMC/  
*Home* CD Liner Note (2000)

**Thank You Letter to SMC/  
Home CD Liner Note (2000)**

Dear SMC:

Last summer, through events that had to have been coordinated by a Higher Power, I had the opportunity to visit Seattle and hear Seattle Men's Chorus perform. As a direct result, my life has changed and this is how it happened.

All you need to know is I am the black sheep of the family. I have not spoken to my parents in thirty years (yes, 30). So the first time I heard SMC perform "Michael's Letter to Mama," I was openly cynical, and thought, 'Yeah right, like some letter will change anything.'

But SMC seems to generate some kind of energy that reaches beyond measures of music to something greater. I was so proud to see you perform: handsome, gifted, generous, happy gay men. Seeing you sing made me proud that I too am openly and happily homosexual. I heard you perform three times in two cities that trip! Each additional time I heard SMC sing "Michael's Letter to Mama" it touched me more deeply. Frankly the third time around it just tore me up.

You can probably see where this is going. I recently sat down and wrote "Sean's Letter to Mama," in my words but sending the same thoughts. To my complete surprise my folks wrote back that they were willing to meet me. I drove three hundred miles last Saturday to see them for the first time in three decades. It went perfectly. My parents were completely supportive and loving. It was healing for me and for them as well.

None of this would have happened if David Maddux had not composed, Armistead had not written, if Seattle Men's Chorus had not put in the hours of labor to learn it and sing it so well.

I send my love and my thanks. You guys are awesome!

My very best wishes,

Sean

## **Appendix J**

SMC Member Handbook

## Mission

---

Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus entertain, enlighten, unify and heal our audience and members, using the power of words and music to recognize the value of gay and straight people and their relationships.

## Vision

---

A world that accepts and values its gay and lesbian citizens.

## Brief History

---

**Seattle Men's Chorus (SMC)** was founded in 1979 by 22 gay men who wanted to sing together for themselves and for the gay community. Today, with close to 300 singing and non-singing members, SMC is acknowledged to be the largest community chorus in America (based on the size of its audience, annual budget and number of staff members) and the largest gay men's chorus in the world.

Seattle Men's Chorus has performed to critical acclaim in the Seattle metropolitan area, as well as other locations in the United States and Europe. The Chorus has performed in several major U.S. cities in venues such as San Francisco's Davies Hall, New York City's Carnegie Hall, Dallas' Meyerson Hall, and Denver's Boettcher Hall. SMC has performed in Europe at London's Westminster Central Hall, Amsterdam's famed Concertgebouw and Barcelona's Palau de la Música Catalana. In 2003, SMC had the opportunity to sing in New Zealand and Australia on the Australasia Tour. Locally, SMC often performs in Coupeville, Everett, Spokane, Wenatchee, Yakima, Tacoma, Edmonds, Bellingham and Bremerton.

**Seattle Women's Chorus (SWC)** was founded in 2002. SWC was born from the desire of women in our community who were seeking an opportunity to perform. In April 2003 SWC premiered its first solo concert aptly titled *Genesis*, performing before a standing-room-only audience. SWC has traveled to Wenatchee, Bellingham, Bremerton and other cities in Washington State. In the summer of 2004, SWC made its GALA debut at the 7<sup>th</sup> International Choral Festival held in Montreal, Canada.

**Captain Smartyants (CSP)** is an SMC ensemble and consists of nine singers under the direction of Eric Lane Barnes. CSP repertoire is based on sounds of close harmony and humor.

**Sensible Shoes (SS)**, an ensemble of SWC, is a pop and vocal jazz group in the tradition of groups like Captain Smartyants and Emerald City Volunteers. This group of women balances great vocal delivery with fun, innovative staging.

Throughout the history of our organization is the long-standing tradition of smaller, vocal ensemble groups (Philandros, Zipper, Emerald City Volunteers). Participating in an ensemble is contingent upon being an SWC/SMC performing member and is by audition. Ensembles maintain a separate weekly rehearsal schedule in addition to regular chorus rehearsals.

## Flying House Productions

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Flying House Productions (FHP) is a Washington non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation doing business as Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus. The organization functions through a set of By-laws. A copy of the By-laws document is available for review through the Chorus Office or member website. All Chorus members should familiarize themselves with these By-laws.

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## Welcome

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Welcome to the Chorus!

You are becoming a part of one of Seattle's most welcoming and affirming GLBT organizations. It's important that you take advantage of the New Member Orientation session and this handbook to help you transition successfully into the group. Also, depend upon your Chorus Buddy or SIS, who can answer many questions and help make the first rehearsals less intimidating.

I always tell new members to just commit to the first concert series, and they'll be hooked. There's nothing quite like standing onstage with your fellow choristers and feeling the pride that our singing mission brings. Be pro-active and let us know about your questions or concerns.

My expectations are that you will be consistent in attendance and that you will be 100% "present" in rehearsals. Get to know your section leader and bring musical concerns to him or her. Take advantage of social opportunities provided by the Chorus, especially the New Member Reception at my home in the next few weeks. I look forward to welcoming you personally into the group.

Dennis Coleman  
*Artistic Director*  
Seattle Men's Chorus  
Seattle Women's Chorus



Welcome! We are honored to have you join our musical family. Working together on music is an exciting, connecting and healing process, from rehearsal through performance.

Once you've experienced how enthusiastically our audiences respond you will understand why SMC and SWC have had such audience (and member) longevity.

Our mission statement says it all: "Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus entertain, enlighten, unify and heal our audience and members, using the power of words and music to recognize the value of gay and straight people and their relationships." These words come true every week at rehearsal, at retreat, at performances, and in all of the ways we work together to bring our performances to our audiences. Getting there can seem overwhelming at first. Please take advantage of the many ways we have of making our members feel at home, and the tools to help learn the music to the best of everyone's abilities. If you feel there is anything you need that isn't covered in this Membership Handbook or in the New Member Orientation, please do not hesitate to ask for clarification or help. Thank you for being THE reason Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus exist. See you at rehearsal!

Eric Lane Barnes  
*Assistant Artistic Director*  
Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus  
*Director, Captain Smartypants*



Welcome to The Seattle Women's Chorus! This is a wonderful organization that I hope you will feel "at home" in soon.

I am looking forward to the pleasure of working with you and getting to know you on a more personal basis. We have many resources available to answer any of your questions so please don't hesitate to use them.

We are a large singing family with a focused vision and mission that changes lives both on and off stage. I encourage you to embrace the mission and enjoy the musical experience!

When you come to rehearsal on Tuesday evenings, tired after a long day at work, remember the words of Berthold Auerbach who said: "Music washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life." I guarantee you will leave feeling refreshed in the music.

Rhonda Juliano  
*Assistant Conductor,*  
Seattle Women's Chorus

# Chorus Membership

---

## PERFORMING MEMBERS

Performing Members are the singing members of the Choruses. Acceptance as a Performing Member follows a successful audition. Periodic re-auditions may be required to maintain membership.

## ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Associate Members are the non-performing members of the Choruses, often regarded as an additional section of each Chorus. These are the behind-the-scenes people helping the choruses to function in many areas. Associate membership brings the same status and rights as a singing member.



**SENSIBLE SHOES**  
A SEATTLE WOMEN'S CHORUS ENSEMBLE

## PRIVILEGES OF MEMBERSHIP

- No monthly dues
- Full voting rights in general meetings
- Half-Priced Season Subscription (not to exceed four per Chorus)
- No handling fee on single ticket purchases
- Free copies of the SMC/SWC season posters
- Social events throughout the year including cast parties, Thanksgiving dinners and socials, and summer picnic

## MEMBER IN GOOD STANDING

- Performing Members, Associate Members or those on a Leave of Absence
- All financial obligations to the Chorus are current
- Have completed a Membership Information Form (MIF) for the quarter

# Core Values

---

Members of – and individuals associated with – Flying House Productions and its choruses embrace these Core Values in our chorus interactions and representations:

### Fairness

- Apply rules or guidelines equitably and consistently.
- Treat each other to a common standard.

### Respect

- Foster an environment of acceptance and non-discrimination
- Recognize and value each other's boundaries and privacy
- Be courteous; treat others as you would expect to be treated with sensitivity and consideration
- honor each other's time and efforts
- If offended, exercise direct communication with the source of the offense to clarify and resolve in a constructive manner
- Celebrate our diversity and our differences as a strength of our organization

### Integrity

- Follow through with commitments
- Consistently behave in a way that builds trust
- Acknowledge and accept your limitations and be willing to ask for help when needed

### Caring

- Be understanding, accepting, and patient
- Encourage participation
- Celebrate each other's successes
- Be sensitive and compassionate to each other's circumstances
- Recognize and appreciate each member's unique contribution

# Member Rights & Responsibilities

---

As an individual associated with SMC/SWC, you have certain rights and responsibilities:

## Individual Rights

- to be respected as an individual
- to be free of sexual, verbal, psychological or physical abuse
- to practice and perform your music in a supportive and professional environment
- to be free from discrimination based on factors such as:
  - race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, musical ability, body type, health status, culture, financial status or education level

## Individual Responsibilities

- to adhere to Core Values and hold others to the same standard
- to know your boundaries, and tell others when they have crossed them
- to intervene when necessary and safe if you observe a member's boundaries or rights being compromised
- to follow organizational bylaws and know your responsibilities as a member

In addition, if you lead a committee, task force or other group of members or volunteers, you have these added responsibilities:

- to exemplify the Core Values
- to monitor and ensure compliance of Core Values
- to ensure individuals know their rights
- to intervene on behalf of individuals
- to support individuals when needed and to protect from retaliation
- to refrain from using leadership role for personal advantage



SMC & SWC at GALA 2008 in Miami, FL

# Policies and Procedures

---

## **NON-DISCRIMINATION**

No one shall be afforded or denied membership with Seattle Men's Chorus/Seattle Women's Chorus on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, marital status, age, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or the presence of any physical, mental or sensory disability.

## **SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Sexual Harassment may be difficult to recognize. It may include any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such conduct may create an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

If a person feels he or she has been subjected to harassment by a chorus or staff member, the person is urged to immediately contact the Company Manager or Executive Director. Concerns will be promptly investigated, and the person who communicates the concern will not suffer retaliation for the report. Confidentiality will be respected.

It is important that all harassment concerns be identified so that appropriate action can be taken. Disciplinary action, up to and including removal from the Chorus and withdrawal of membership privileges, will be taken against those who violate this policy.

## **NAME TAGS**

Bring your name tag to every rehearsal, performance (including run-outs), or other Chorus activity so your volunteer hours may be recorded.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Attendance is very important to the success of the show. If singers do not attend rehearsal, they are not prepared to sing in the show. Therefore, as a singing member of Seattle Men's Chorus or Seattle Women's Chorus:

- If you will be absent for a rehearsal, contact your section leader.
- After 4 absences you will be asked to re-voice with Eric Lane Barnes or Rhonda Juliano to make sure you're where you should be as it pertains to memorization, quality, and understanding of the music for the quarter.
- After 5 absences you will be automatically placed on leave and will not be allowed to sing in that concert.

We understand situations arise that are out of our control. If this happens to you, stay in contact with your section leader and/or company manager to find out your options before not singing that quarter.

Please see the additional attendance handout for more details.

## **PERFORMANCE ATTENDANCE**

Each singing member is required to attend both the Technical and Dress rehearsal prior to the performance. Failure to be at one or both will result in the singer being placed on a leave of absence and they will not be allowed to perform.

## **RUN-OUT ATTENDANCE**

Run-outs are not required performances but they are very important to the Chorus' mission and you are highly encouraged to participate.

## **MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION FORM (MIF)**

The MIF is a form that is distributed at the beginning of each quarter. This form contains all your personal information and is to be checked for its accuracy at least once a quarter. You may update your information at any time by contacting the Company Manager.

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

A member may take a leave of absence from the Chorus for no more than one year. This is 2 consecutive quarters for SWC and 3 consecutive quarters for SMC. A quarter is defined as one concert cycle. If a member doesn't return by the beginning of the third quarter, they will automatically be placed on Past Member status and be required to re-audition if they wish to sing with the Chorus in the future. Re-auditions are to be scheduled with the Company Manager at least one month prior to first rehearsal the returning member wishes to sing.

**HEALTH AND HYGIENE**

There are singers in the Chorus who have compromised immune systems. Therefore, it is important to use good judgment and be thoughtful of those around you when you are experiencing illness. This may mean sitting in the back, keeping your distance, or staying home from rehearsal when necessary.

Body odor, including bad breath, can be very distracting and unpleasant for the people around you. Many people in the choruses are adversely affected by perfumes, colognes and other scented body products. Bearing in mind that we are in close proximity to each other in rehearsal and performance, you should try to be as odor neutral as possible. Please be thoughtful.

**VIDEO, AUDIO, AND PHOTOGRAPHY**

Each show may have different rules based on many factors. Only those individuals who are asked by Chorus staff may video record, photograph, or audio record *any* part of a concert. Cameras (including camera phones) may not be used on stage unless approved by Artistic Director or Staff. Cameras, phones, or other recording devices may not be on stage during Dress or a performance under any circumstance. Additionally, members may not sit out in the audience during tech or dress and record the performance in any way.

**TECHNOLOGY**

When taking pictures back stage, or at any other event, please take care about how you use those photos. Obtain permission from the subjects before placing their images on the internet including facebook, YouTube, etc. You may not upload any audio or video on any video sharing site like YouTube without express permission from Flying House Productions.

**PRIVACY POLICY**

Members' personal information is never given out to the general public. At times, SMC/SWC is asked to share mailing lists of its constituents. You may choose to not have any information released by checking the appropriate box on the Membership Information Form (MIF). The MIFs are used to create a Chorus roster, available online or in a paper version by requesting a copy from the Company Manager. Your chorus roster is for you and you alone. Never loan your roster to anyone. Shred the roster when you are done with it.

**GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE**

It is imperative that the Choruses respect the feedback and input of all members. The following Grievance Procedure and Productivity Tool has been established to open the lines of communication and create solutions to issues that may compromise the effectiveness of the organization or the contribution of its members.

When there is an issue with an individual, follow these steps:

1. Communicate directly with the individual in a constructive way that adheres to the Core Values
2. Talk to your Section Leader
3. Talk to the Company Manager
4. Talk to the Executive Director
  - a. You may elevate your issue to the Board, however if it is a member or staff issue, they will refer you back to the Executive Director who is responsible for staffing.

**PRODUCTIVITY TOOL**

If a member has feedback, spots a problem, or has a concern about anything they should feel comfortable following the Grievance Procedure mentioned in the previous paragraph. However, if they wish to remain anonymous, they may by using the Productivity Tool.

- The tool is a form which you may obtain by downloading it from the member site or requesting one from the Company Manager.
- Complete the form and return it to the Company Manager, or email it to [haliel@flyinghouse.org](mailto:haliel@flyinghouse.org).

The form will be routed to the appropriate person to handle the concern. The member will be contacted within 5 business days with a response. If the member requested to remain anonymous, there may not be a public response. If the member is unsatisfied with the response, they may escalate the issue to the next appropriate person and/or request a private meeting with the individual and their superior. If the issue is brought to the board, the board may choose to appoint a designee to research the matter. Board decisions are final.

It is important for Chorus members to communicate responsibly and constructively. Follow all Chorus values when communicating on the phone, via email, or in person. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action up to and including removal from the Chorus.

**ASSOCIATE POLICY**

Acceptance as an Associate Member follows a successful probationary first quarter of service. During this probationary period, the individual cannot vote during the annual meeting and must complete and record at least 10 hours of volunteer work.

To remain an Associate in good standing, the member will have to maintain and complete the following on a fiscal year basis (Oct 1 to Sept 31)

- All financial commitments to the Chorus are current.
- Have completed a Membership Information Form (MIF), code of conduct, and performance release form each concert quarter.
- Have recorded and validated 10 hours per quarter or 40 hours per fiscal year of voluntary service to the Choruses.
- Associate Members who wish or need to take a Leave of Absence (LOA) may remain on LOA for no more than (2) two consecutive fiscal quarters.
- Members will notify in writing the Company Manager and Associate Lead about beginning their LOA (some examples notating MIF, mail, or email).
- Members who need to extend past the two quarters will be categorized as a Past Member resulting in the loss of their voting privileges.
- Members who return the quarter after their standard LOA will not lose voting privileges.
- Members who return after an extended LOA (4 quarters/1 year) will result in a first quarter probationary period.
- Members who fail to maintain or fulfill their voluntary service will have their status changed to Volunteer.

## CONCERT ATTIRE

Members are responsible for obtaining and caring for a complete ensemble for performances. Assistance may be available. Please contact the Company Manager with questions. You should label all items that belong to you. You are not guaranteed that it will be found after the show. Leave all valuables at home or in your vehicle.

### Seattle Men's Chorus:

- Black, standard, single breasted notched-lapel tuxedo and pants
- Black bow tie and cummerbund
- White, standard pleat, wing collar tux shirt
- Black studs and cufflinks (it doesn't matter if gold or silver)
- Black dress shoes, preferably not patent leather

### Seattle Women's Chorus:

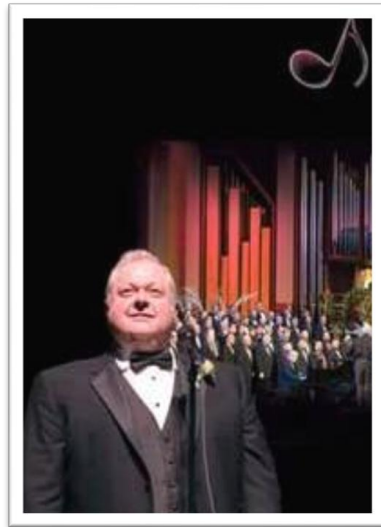
- Black stardust top and palazzo pants (custom ordered by Company Manager)
- Black dress shoes, heels no taller than 1", closed toe and heel, no ornamentation, no patent leather. No sandals or clogs
- No jewelry except stud earrings and rings

## SPECIAL COSTUMES

From time to time, the Artistic Director will designate a certain costuming guideline for a show that can often be met with items from your personal wardrobe or purchased at a reasonable price from one of the many used clothing stores.

## FIVE F'S OF FABULOSITY

1. **FACE** - Stage lights wash out faces and make them shine in ways you don't want to see as an audience member. Use of makeup is strongly encouraged (especially for SWC members). Think of our performance as theatre. We are playing a role and we want to appear as professional as possible.
2. **FOOTWEAR** - SMC: Black dress shoes, preferably not patent leather with black socks. SWC: Shoes must be black (not patent leather), closed toe, closed heel (no straps), with a rise no greater than 1 inch. A simple black slip-on shoe is perfect. Stockings or knee-highs should be opaque black (not sheer).
3. **FRAGRANCE** - One rule: remain as odor-neutral as possible. No body odor, no perfume or cologne. This includes no scented hair products, lotions, or deodorants. Smokers, please be very considerate of your non-smoking members. Cigarette smoke clings to your clothes and can affect your neighbors. We ask that you don't smoke once in concert attire and if you do, wash your hands and rinse your mouth before returning to stage or rehearsal. Brush your teeth or use mouthwash prior to rehearsals/performances.
4. **FRILLS** - Jewelry is to be kept to a minimum. Earrings should be studs only or small hoops. If you can fit your pinky finger through the hoop, they're too big. SMC can wear a watch (SWC can't) but no necklaces or bracelets. The only exception would be medic alert items. The goal is to not wear things that sparkle or make noise.
5. **FOUNDATIONS** - SWC: Bras must be worn with your performance attire. The bra must be black and not a sports bra. A white bra is very noticeable to the audience and white bra straps are easily seen.



#### **EMERGENCY STAGE PROCEDURES**

- During the first tech rehearsal of each run, the Artistic Director will have any people with medical training or CPR training identify themselves.
- People with fevers, persistent coughs, chest pains, severe headache, nausea or dizziness should not go out on stage. The first defense to on-stage emergencies is not to go on stage if you aren't feeling well.
- If a person starts to feel ill or faint while on stage, they should quietly alert the people to either side of them and try to sit down on the risers until they feel better. At an appropriate applause break between songs, they should get up and quietly leave the risers and exit to back stage, with their neighbors' assistance if necessary. Let the people around you know you aren't feeling well so they can be prepared if there are more serious complications later.
- If a person actually passes out, their neighbors should try to catch them if they are aware of the problem and gently lower them down to the risers. Lay them flat and check for pulse and breathing, letting them lie quietly for a few moments. If they regain consciousness within 30 to 60 seconds, let them rest until the next appropriate break, then assist them off stage. Most fainting spells are brief and not particularly serious.
- If someone appears to faint or fall, and they don't regain consciousness within a minute, appear awake but can't talk, have numbness or paralysis, get assistance and move them off stage regardless of what is happening in the performance. Notify the stage manager to call for an ambulance.

In case of extreme medical emergency, heart attack or similar event where the victim is down and not breathing, get assistance and if it can be done quickly, move the victim off the risers and back stage.

Once off stage, begin CPR immediately and send someone to notify the stage manager to call for an ambulance. If the victim's position on the risers prevents a quick movement off stage, move them down to the stage floor to an area clear of cords and equipment while sending someone to notify the stage manager, and begin CPR on stage till medical help arrives. An exception is a person who is having a seizure. Do not attempt to move them or put anything in their mouths. People around the victim should remove their jackets and place them under and around the head to prevent further injury. Prevent the victim from rolling off the risers. A seizure will normally last only 30 seconds to 2 minutes. When the seizure stops, the victim will be dazed and confused and may even be combative. When they calm down, assist them off stage and have the stage manager call an ambulance.

## **CODE OF CONDUCT**

Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus' mission is to "... *entertain, enlighten, unify and heal our audience and Members, using the power of words and music to recognize the value of gay and straight people and their relationships.*"

As singing and associate Members of Seattle Men's Chorus, Seattle Women's Chorus and Flying House Productions, each of us plays a vital role in ensuring that we create and maintain a community that allows for this kind of positive interaction, whether within our own ranks, or between ourselves and the greater community. To this end, we are all expected to exhibit behavior that is consistent with both our mission and the values spelled out in FHP's *Code of Conduct* document.

The following guidelines detail specific expectations regarding our interactions with each other and within the community, as well as the consequences that will follow when we fail to honor the values that all Members are asked to embrace when signing the *Code of Conduct*.

### **Public Appearances**

Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus routinely engage in a wide range of activities where Members interface with the public. These include not only our performances, but also activities like PR appearances, fundraisers, tours, retreats, social events, and other situations that bring us into contact with people outside the organization. These interactions may be face-to-face, or be conducted as distance communications such as phone calls, emails, chat rooms, etc.

1. When representing the Choruses at public events and performances, Members are expected to conduct themselves in a professional and congenial manner on- or off-stage.
2. To the extent that they might be seen as representing the Choruses in other types of public interaction, Members are asked to conduct themselves with a healthy respect for the impact their actions may have on the Choruses' reputation and standing in the community.

### **Communication**

1. Communications via the organization's ListServ groups are held to the same standard of respect and consideration as any form of Member interaction.
2. Communications between Members concerning personal matters should be made directly between the individuals involved, rather than through rumor or innuendo.
3. Out of respect for people's privacy, Members are asked to refrain from contacting other Members at their place of business unless they have received prior permission to do so.

### **Harassment**

1. If, at any time, a Member of the FHP community feels threatened, harassed, sexually harassed or otherwise intimidated by another, and feels that he or she is unable to work out the situation privately, that person is urged to immediately contact the Company Manager, Chair of Membership Services or Executive Director. Confidentiality will be respected and maintained as much as possible to resolve the incident.
2. If a satisfactory resolution cannot be worked out with this initial contact, the reporting Member may escalate the discussion to a panel consisting of: the Company Manager, the Executive Director, the Chair of Membership Services, the President of the Board (or a representative of the HR Committee) and, if appropriate, the Artistic Director.

## **Code of Conduct (Continued)**

### ***Criminal Record***

Our Choruses have a long history of being open and non-judgmental communities in which the ability to participate is based solely on one's skills, abilities, and commitment. Occasionally, this value comes into tension with the duty of the Choruses to protect our Members, audiences, and the Choruses' reputation from harm. It is FHP's position that it is the job of the civic authorities, not the Choruses, to pass judgment concerning individual Members who run afoul of civic laws. Accordingly, we leave it to the authorities to decide who is guilty and who is not, who deserves punishment, and at what point an offender's debt to society has been paid. Our willingness to allow individuals with criminal records to participate as Members is thus guided by the presumed wisdom of the legal system and the U.S. Constitution.

1. Members with criminal backgrounds who have successfully discharged their obligations as offenders, and whose activities and movements are not limited by the courts, will not have their Chorus activities restricted solely by virtue of their past history. Members whose activities *are* prescribed in some manner are required to bring such limitations to the immediate attention of the Executive Director or Artistic Director, who will determine whether participation will be possible, and under what terms.
2. Members with past criminal backgrounds who do participate within the organization should bear in mind that their behavior and activities will be subject to ongoing scrutiny. Should a Member be named as a suspect, placed under arrest, and/or arraigned for a felony *while* a Member of the Choruses, that Member's Membership will be suspended pending resolution of the case.
3. Finally, when a Member's history or activities in the community have earned them such a degree of notoriety that their continuing participation would, in the opinion of the Choruses, severely harm the organization's reputation, that individual's Membership may be refused or terminated regardless of their present good behavior.

### ***Substance Abuse***

1. The Chorus is an ensemble, and individuals behaving erratically due to substance abuse harm the communal creative process and distract from the performance. Substance abuse also exposes the Choruses to liability in terms of insurance coverage, the ability to utilize venues, etc., and cannot be tolerated.
2. Members found to be using alcohol or illegal drugs during Chorus activities, with the exception of sanctioned social events featuring alcohol, will be asked to leave the premises on that occasion. Members thought to be functioning sub-par at Chorus events due to the influence of alcohol or other drugs consumed off-site (including prescription medication), will also be asked to leave the specific rehearsal or performance.
3. While individual incidents will be handled as above, on-going impairment at Chorus activities will be addressed by the Artistic Director, the Company Manager and the Member's Section Leader.

### ***Rehearsals***

In order to preserve an atmosphere of mutual respect and enjoyment, every Member is expected to conduct him or herself in a professional and considerate manner whenever rehearsals are in progress.

1. Members are expected to show basic courtesy and respect to both artistic and staff members, whether in rehearsal or performance situations.
2. Excessive talking - or any other disruptive or "attention getting" behavior - is strongly discouraged. It not only distracts the person at the podium (Artistic Director, Company Manager or other person making an announcement) but also interferes with other Members' learning process and concentration.
3. Babies/kids/pets: Young children (infants/toddlers) should not be brought to rehearsal. Service animals only please.
4. Members are encouraged to discuss their concerns about any disruptive behavior directly with the individuals who are being disruptive. If this proves ineffective - or if the Member is not comfortable doing this - he/she should talk to the Section Leader, the Company Manager or the Chair of the Membership Services Committee.

## Code of Conduct (Continued)

### Consequences of Misconduct

1. If a Member acts in a disruptive, harmful, or dysfunctional manner (as defined in the preceding sections of this document), a panel consisting of the Artistic Director, the Executive Director, the President of the Board of Directors (or a representative of the HR Committee) and the Chair of the Membership Services Committee may jointly implement any or all of the following disciplinary actions at any time:
  - a. Verbal Warning
  - b. Mediation
  - c. Suspension (with ability to return/re-audition after a period to be determined)
  - d. Permanent expulsion
2. In the event of a disagreement within the panel, a majority vote shall determine the outcome of the decision.
3. If the Member feels that the determined consequences of his/her action outweigh the transgression, he/she may appeal these actions to the full Board of Directors.

Rev. 6-12-09

## MUSIC

Each singing member receives one free copy of all the music to be performed for the current quarter. All music is checked out from the Chorus Librarian, upon the submission of your completed MIF form, at the beginning of each quarter. Additional pieces may be handed out at later rehearsals. Music should be placed in a black 3-ring binder. It is advisable to separate the pieces with divider tabs. You should keep a pencil with you during all rehearsals to make notes in the music. Although most of the music you receive will be photocopies, original sheet music is sometimes distributed. **Original sheet music must be marked only in pencil.** All original sheet music is to be returned to the Chorus Librarian at the end of the quarter.

The Chorus performs a wide variety of music throughout each season. The pieces are memorized, as it is the policy of SMC/SWC to sing all concerts without music. The Artistic Director chooses all the music. SMC/SWC often commissions artists to create new works specifically for us. The SMC/SWC attempts to perform music that will interest, enlighten, entertain and challenge our audiences. *If you ever have a serious concern about a piece of music, please bring it to the attention of your Section Leader, the Company Manager or Artistic Director.*

## Financial Information

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### TAX DEDUCTIBLE EXPENSES

Some expenses incurred in connection with participation in SMC/SWC may be tax deductible. You should consult with your tax advisor for specific advice as to what constitutes a tax deductible expense.

### MEMBERSHIP ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (MAP)

The MAP is currently under development. The MAP is designed to provide members financial assistance to cover costs related to Retreat, GALA, and Tours.

# Chorus Communications

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## EMAIL LISTSERVS

Our email lists are actually Google Groups. Each Chorus (SMC & SWC) has two email lists: one Announce and one Chat. Members are automatically added to the Announce list only. You must sign up for the Chat/Sirensong lists on your own. We ask that if you receive an email from anyone on either of the SMC/SWC ListSers, do not forward that email on to anyone who is not a member of SMC/SWC (doing so would pass on the member's email address).

### Seattle Men's Chorus

Chat Group URL/Sign-up: [groups.google.com/group/smc-chat](https://groups.google.com/group/smc-chat)  
Chat Group email: [SMC-chat@googlegroups.com](mailto:SMC-chat@googlegroups.com)

Announce Group URL: [groups.google.com/group/smc-announce](https://groups.google.com/group/smc-announce)

### Seattle Women's Chorus

SirenSong (chat) Group URL / Sign-up: [groups.google.com/group/swc-sirensong](https://groups.google.com/group/swc-sirensong)  
SirenSong email: [swc-sirensong@googlegroups.com](mailto:swc-sirensong@googlegroups.com)

Announce Group URL: [groups.google.com/group/swc-announce](https://groups.google.com/group/swc-announce)



### **Announce Lists:**

Only a select group of people are allowed to post messages to the Announce lists making the volume of emails on these lists much lower (1-2 a day during concert seasons). These lists are for "official" Chorus communication only. Only current members are allowed to be on the Announce Lists. Membership to the Announce Google Group required for receiving these messages.

### **Chat / SirenSong email lists:**

These lists are an open forum. The members share thoughts, ideas, job openings, etc with other members. Membership is voluntary. There is a high volume of messages sent to these lists (10-25 a day). Current members, past members and friends of members are allowed to be on this list. All members can post messages. Membership to the corresponding Google Group is required for sending and receiving these messages.

### **REHEARSAL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Official Announcements are made each week at rehearsal by the Company Manager. These are reserved for business only and are kept as brief as possible. Chorus member are encouraged to use other resources to communicate with each other.

### **THE MUSIC MAN / CHORUS LINE**

*The Music Man/Chorus Line* (MMCL) is the internal newsletter for the Chorus membership. It is published weekly (except during July and August) and sent electronically to each member with an email address. A hard copy of the newsletter is available at rehearsals. It offers important information about the happenings within both Choruses, committee information, ticket information, schedule of rehearsals and concerts, news, current events, text translations, repertoire, and much more. The MMCL accepts short articles, classified ads and other items of interest to the Chorus membership. All submissions are subject to editing.

#### **Submission of Materials** - due every Friday by 3:00 PM

- Email your submission (without extensive formatting) to [editors@flyinghouse.org](mailto:editors@flyinghouse.org)

Current and archive copies of *The Music Man/Chorus Line* are available for download in PDF format at on the member website [www.flyinghouse.org/members/](http://www.flyinghouse.org/members/).

### **MEMBER WEBSITE**

[WWW.FLYINGHOUSE.ORG/MEMBERS](http://WWW.FLYINGHOUSE.ORG/MEMBERS)

With this password protected site, you can view calendars, look up members and view contact information, download rehearsal files or pdf's of current sheet music. The member site is managed by a volunteer, any questions about content or access should be directed towards the Company Manager.

#### **ROSTER**

The Roster is a directory of all Chorus members, volunteers, board members, etc. This listing of chorus members is published twice a year (November and March). Information in the directory includes address, phone numbers, month and day of birth, and email addresses (including those members on leave of absence). Members may choose to restrict the amount of information listed in the roster by updating the roster section on their MIF. You may access a searchable online version of the Roster on the member website which is updated after the beginning of each quarter.

The Roster is for **Chorus use only** and is not to be released or shared with the general public. Members are encouraged to have their pictures taken for inclusion in the Roster. You may send a headshot of yourself to [MIF@flyinghouse.org](mailto:MIF@flyinghouse.org) if you'd like a different picture. When you discard your Roster, please shred it for security and privacy concerns. Do not distribute names, addresses or phone numbers from the SMC/SWC Roster to anyone not a member of SMC/SWC (even if it is for your favorite good cause) (or to that cutie who just wants a date with a particular SMC/SWC member).

#### **FLYINGHOUSE.ORG**

Flyinghouse.org is the primary website for Flying House Productions including Seattle Men's Chorus, Seattle Women's Chorus, Captain Smartypants, and Sensible Shoes. On our website, a patron can purchase tickets, CD's, logo merchandise as well as view our history, request a performance and view our most current Flying House Magazine.

## Retreat

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Retreat is an intensive and fun weekend-long rehearsal designed to focus the members on the current quarter's music and choreography. Retreat is an annual event and rehearsal attendance is compulsory and as such, it counts as 3 rehearsals. In addition to the rehearsals, there are many exciting events including no-talent shows, awards banquets and dance parties! Retreat costs anywhere from \$45 - \$300 depending upon the options you choose at registration. Financial assistance may be available through the Membership Assistance Program (MAP). See your retreat lead or registration lead for more information.

## Social Events

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### **CAST PARTIES**

Each chorus holds 1 or 2 cast parties a year to celebrate the success and hard work you have put in. Details about location and assorted addition details will always be announced in rehearsals and in the *Music MAN/CHORUS Line*.

### **THANKSGIVING SOCIAL**

Annually the members of the FHP family celebrate together on the Sunday before Thanksgiving. Members and their guests meet at individual homes for a traditional Thanksgiving dinner. Then everyone meets at one location for a dessert social.

Members sign up to either host a dinner or attend a dinner. The membership services committee then assigns guests to each of the volunteer host homes. The gathering is done as a mixer to encourage our members to meet new people. The host cooks the main dish and their assigned guests bring the rest of the dinner. For those who prefer, there will be a vegetarian dinner as well. One person from each dinner is asked to bring an item to the dessert social.

This is a great opportunity to get to know your fellow chorus members and enjoy a great meal. Even if you choose not to attend a dinner, you're welcome to join us at the dessert social.

### **SUMMER PICNIC**

Each summer, members gather to celebrate the community that is the Chorus. Usually held at a member's house, the Chorus provides the entrée and the guests bring side dishes and desserts. It's a great time to meet other members.

## Volunteer Opportunities

You get more out of your chorus experience, in direct proportion to the amount of time and energy you put into it. Below are listed some of the many volunteer opportunities available. More specifics will be announced at rehearsals—during the Break Announcements, and in *The Music Man/Chorus Line* newsletter.

- Office Support (weekdays 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.)
- Ticket Sales (weekdays noon – 7 p.m.)
- Rehearsal Support (Mondays & Tuesdays)
- Production (Tech rehearsal, Dress rehearsal & concerts)
- Newsletter
- Box Office (in-town concerts)
- Merchandise (in and out of town concerts)
- Gala Auction (April)
- Holiday Raffle Sales
- Directors Circle Party (August & December)
- Retreats (Winter or Spring)
- Dessert Social (November)
- Pride (June)
- Summer Picnic (July or August)
- Committee Support



Heat Miser & Snow Miser in SMC 2009 *Santa Baby*

## People

Amy Alesio	Staff Accountant	206-323-0750 x210	amya@flyinghouse.org
Eric Lane Barnes	Assistant Artistic Director	206-325-2021	elb@ericlanebarnes.com
Halie Looper	Company Manager	206-323-0750 x224	haliel@flyinghouse.org
Kevin Carson	Box Office Manager	206-388-1400	kevinc@flyinghouse.org
Dennis Coleman	Artistic Director	206-320-0480	dennisfhp@comcast.net
Thom Courcelle	Development/Database	206-323-0750 x217	thomc@flyinghouse.org
Colleen Dodson	Development Manager	206-323-0750 x222	colleend@flyinghouse.org
TJ Elston	Librarian		librarian@flyinghouse.org
Billy Frantz	Assistant Stage Manager		billyf@flyinghouse.org
Kevin Gallagher	ASL Interpreter SMC		keving@flyinghouse.org
Nancy Hautala	Stage Manager		nancyh@flyinghouse.org
Rhonda Juliano	Assistant Conductor (SWC)		rhondaj@flyinghouse.org
Jennifer Jacobs-Springer	Mktg Assoc/Graphic Designer	206-323-0750 x209	jenniferjs@flyinghouse.org
Gerry Kunkel	Community Relations Manager	206-323-0750 x205	gerryk@flyinghouse.org
Jody Mayer	ASL Interpreter SWC		JodyM@flyinghouse.org
Carol Mastenbrook	Interim Executive Director	206-323-0750 x212	carolm@flyinghouse.org
Frank Stilwagner	Marketing Director	206-323-0750 x208	franks@flyinghouse.org

## SECTION LEADERS

Section Leads act as a liaison to the Artistic Director, informing him of questions, concerns, or issues with music or choreography and assist members of their section with questions or concerns they may have about the music or choreography. Section Leads also work with the Company Manager to monitor rehearsal attendance and ensure that each member of their section who is present at rehearsal has had the opportunity to mark the sign-in sheets.

There is a Section Leader for each vocal section. The names and sections of all the Section Leaders are also listed in the Roster. This is the person to contact when you have any musical questions, comments and concerns. In addition to the duties outlined above, your Section Leader works with the Artistic Director to help locate places in the music where the section may need assistance with learning the part as well as assess performance readiness for the members of their section.

### SMC

1st Tenors (Upper): UpT1@flyinghouse.org  
1st Tenors (Lower): LoT1@flyinghouse.org  
2nd Tenors (Upper): UpT2@flyinghouse.org  
2nd Tenors (Lower): LoT2@flyinghouse.org  
Baritones (Upper): UpB1@flyinghouse.org  
Baritones (Lower): LoB1@flyinghouse.org  
Bass (Upper): UpB2@flyinghouse.org  
Bass (Lower): LoB2@flyinghouse.org

### SWC

1st Soprano: SOP1@flyinghouse.org  
2nd Soprano (Upper): SOP2@flyinghouse.org  
2nd Soprano (Lower): SOP2@flyinghouse.org  
1st Alto (Upper): U1AL@flyinghouse.org  
1st Alto (Lower): L1AL@flyinghouse.org  
2nd Alto: ALT2@flyinghouse.org

**Associate Lead** associatelead@flyinghouse.org



Hairspray number in *Lullaby of Broadway* SWC 2009

## Flying House Productions

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319 12<sup>th</sup> Ave  
Seattle WA 98122

206-323-0750  
206-323-9425 fax  
206-388-1400 box office

info@flyinghouse.org