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Brant Men of Song celebrate 65th anniversary with concert

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To mark its 65th anniversary, the Brant Men of Song will host a "Sapphire Celebration" at a concert called Ontario Sings. The event, held at the Sanderson Centre on Sunday, May 31, will bring together six male choruses, including those from Guelph, Niagara, Burlington, Toronto and Cambridge. Pictured with the group are artistic director Bill Schatz; assistant director Sylvia Jarvis; and Amy Groleau, accompanist/concert coordinator. SUBMITTED PHOTO

A formidable men's chorus is calling on reluctant singers to let their vocal talents shine.

A Day of Choral Singing is one of the ways the Brant Men of Song are celebrating their 65th anniversary.

Both men and women aged 19 and over are invited to unleash their inner singer on April 11 from 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Hope Christian Reformed Church, 64 Buchanan Cres. in Brantford for an introduction to four-part harmony, basic music theory and singing with a massed chorus.

"More people can sing than realize they can sing," said Leo Renzella, who is chair of Brant Men of Song's 65th anniversary committee and a 27-year member of the chorus.

He said it sometimes takes just one criticism of a person's vocal abilities to relegate them to a lifetime of singing when nobody's listening.

Not all voices are equal, said Renzella, but he likens the blend of sound to making a good soup: when you mix all the ingredients together, it tastes – and sounds – great.

Workshop participants will learn four songs featuring the four main vocal ranges in choral music – soprano, alto, tenor and bass.

The music lesson will culminate in an evening performance at the church, with free admission, but with financial contributions gratefully accepted for the Brantford Food Bank. Participants can register at www.brantmenofsong.ca

Although there's no commitment required for workshop participants, Renzella is hopeful those who love the experience will want to become members of the Brant Men of Song or its female counterpart, Brant County Singers, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

The Brant Men of Song dates back to the early 1960s when local lawyer Bob McIntosh, a young clarinet and saxophone player, approached Frank Holton, who was heavily involved in music both inside and outside local schools, proposing Holton conduct a new choir.

McIntosh was the leader of a barbershop quartet but was interested in singing a broader range of music.

That the Brant Men of Song was formed, in 1961, was no small feat, wrote group member Robert MacMillan in their archives, in a community that has been called the "City of Choirs."

It began as a simple 16-member chorus that informally entertained local audiences.

From there, it initiated a concert season and then joined the Association of American Male Choruses and began performing as guests of other choirs in Ontario and the United States.

In 1973, it hosted a male chorus festival composed of 28 choirs from Ontario and the U.S. at the civic centre.

On a bus ride back from a district performance, the spouses of the Brant Men of Song decided they, too, wanted to sing and, in 1971, the Brant Bell 'A' Dears – now the Brant County Singers – was formed.

To mark its 65-year history — and its standing as the fourth-longest running male chorus in Canada — Brant Men of Song will host a "Sapphire Celebration" at a concert called Ontario Sings. The event will bring together six male choruses, including those from Guelph, Niagara, Burlington, Toronto and Cambridge, at the Sanderson Centre in Brantford.

The concert, on May 31, will include individual performances by each chorus, as well as a selection of chorus pieces with more than 150 male voices ringing out in mass harmony.

"When you get a chance to experience that many voices, the music changes," said Renzella. "There's a connectivity when the voices come together and it just starts to soar."

Although the type of songs on the bill depend largely on who is conducting the group — Bill Shatz is now in his 14th year in that role, with Amy Groleau as musical accompanist — Brant Men of Song have performed, over the years, everything from hymns to show tunes to folk music to pop, always

trying to find a balance between secular and sacred.

The chorus will perform Journey On, and the Beatles' Something at the anniversary show.

Tickets are \$35 and available at the Sanderson Centre box office or online at sandersoncentre.ca

Now 33 members strong, the Brant Men of Song practice Tuesday evenings. In addition to its concert schedule, the group performs at various charity and community events.

“Singing is a way to connect,” said Renzella. “It’s a social tool. We need to find ways to connect with others and experience the feeling of being part of something greater.”



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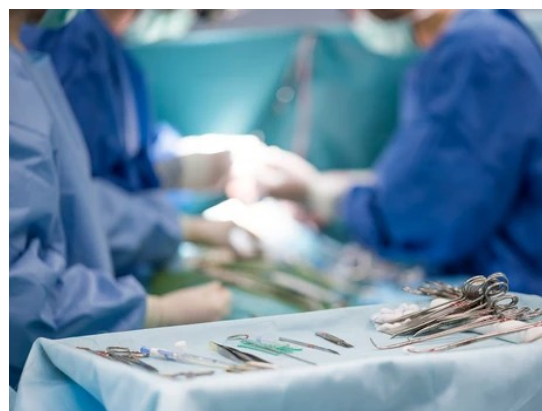
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