

Artist Spotlight - Da Camera Singers

Northfield Community Newsletter

April/May, 2019, p. 13



The Northfield Cultural Council has begun a series of articles that shine a light on local artists. Our first article highlights Da Camera Singers. Da Camera Singers is an auditioned, acapella choir of about 40 members. Five of the members live in Northfield.

I met with Patter Field and her husband Ted Thornton; you may have seen them singing and playing guitar at the Farmers Market in town or in the choir at the Northfield Trinitarian Church. Patter joined in Da Camera in 2004 and Ted in 2013. Patter sings 2nd alto and is the grant writer for the group. Ted is a natural baritone but sings 2" bass. He also manages the group's website. Sheila Heffernon, an accomplished conductor, directs the group, which rehearses once a week at Amherst College, and prepares for each practice session with weekly homework. Rehearsals are structured and require concentration. The group works for many weeks to master their music before performing a concert. Ted stated, "Sheila has perfect pitch and can hear any wrong note." Da Camera performs in different languages as well as in modern English: Byzantine Greek, Latin, Old English, Dutch, French, German, and Spanish.

"Then and Now", their recent concert performed in January, was a new and exciting performance. They reached out to musical communities throughout New England to advertise a contest for young composers. The prize was to have their piece performed by the Da Camera in concert. 3 young composers were chosen. Ted expressed his delight to see the glow on the young composers' faces when they first heard us singing their piece. Patter and Ted mentioned today's challenges with keeping young people interested in music, which was one of the reasons for the project.

When I asked Patter what makes the group so much fun for her, she said, "I love singing. It's a great release. I love the people in the group." I asked Ted the same question; he said, "It is the sound and the connection. It is a transcendent experience; it connects me with memories, with my friend Steve Tower, my father, and my grandfather. There is joy in sharing with 40 voices in this time and space, a deep connection." "There is a deeper knowing." He quoted St. Augustine, the 4th century Theologian, "Whoever sings, prays twice".

"

I then asked them both to explain one of their most memorable/deep emotional experiences encountered while singing in the group. Patter recalled "the poem "Hold" by Anna Meek." Craig Sanford was commissioned to write the music for it. "The concept was that by sustaining your breath, breathing in turn with your neighbor, you hold each other up." She said, "Music taps a deep well of feeling, evokes memory, and brings you to the verge of tears."

Ted stated for him, it was Bach's B Minor Mass. This complex mass is made up of many religious themes, and a lot of notes. As they rehearsed, he lived with the piece for almost a full year. He talked about how he researches the composers to get to know them. He touched on Bach who was a dorm master and amazingly, composed masterpieces amidst all the noise coming through the walls.

It was truly inspirational talking to Patter and Ted. They gave me a deeper understanding of the music, work and time that goes into one concert, and the emotional and the spiritual aspect that many seek in their everyday lives, which they get to experience every time they sing.

Da Camera Singers is community oriented and gives to local charities and non-profits, holds benefit concerts and donates some of their proceeds from performances..Their concerts are free and accessible to all. They do accept donations, and some of the events are sponsored. Their spring concert, "Dissident Voices" will be held on May 31, 2019 at 8 p.m.at Helen Hills Hills Chapel, Smith College, Northampton, and on June 2, 2019 at 3 p.m. at The Church of Saints James and Andrew, Greenfield, MA. You can learn more about the group and hear some of their music online at dacamerasingers.org.

Respectfully submitted, Mandy Lyn Sweet-Antes (Northfield Cultural Council Member)