

## **Inland Children's Chorus Web site and Preservation Project**

**Website: [InlandChorus.com](http://InlandChorus.com)**

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### **General and Personal Comments**

The Inland Children's Chorus represents for me, especially as an educator, how industry can make—in a single project—a substantial and multi-generational contribution to young people, the performing arts, and the community. Formed in the heart of the Great Depression, the Chorus demonstrates the courage and vision of the far-sighted individuals who worked to reach that goal.

I share the sentiments of other former members who say they were lucky to have been part of the Chorus. More than nostalgia, we owe a great debt to the Chorus: we experienced during our formative years how hard work, collaborative effort, dedication to a project, and an appreciation of excellence not only developed our character but also enriched the performing arts and our community.

*CBS Sunday Morning* reported on a 2009 study finding that children who sing in choruses achieve academic success and develop valuable life skills. The history of the Inland Chorus is important because it offers a model for providing such opportunities to young people. See [www.chorusamerica.org/about\\_choralsinging.cfm](http://www.chorusamerica.org/about_choralsinging.cfm).

One former member of the Chorus, Stephen Roddy, directs the Houston Children's Chorus which has performed for U.S. Presidents, at Carnegie Hall, and worldwide: <http://www.houstonchildren.org/>. Mr. Roddy says that the Inland Children's Chorus was "an incredible influence on my life and career."

### **Brief History of the Chorus**

The Inland Children's Chorus (1936-1970) was an original and historically unique contribution by an American industry to the development of young people through the performing arts. One of the country's outstanding children's singing groups, the Chorus became well known through its widely popular and critically acclaimed concerts, national radio broadcasts, and television performances.

The Chorus was sponsored for its nearly 35 years by the Inland Manufacturing Division of General Motors Corporation to give 8-16 year old children of employees "a musical education and training which they otherwise might not be able to obtain, and to make a contribution to the cultural life of Inland employees and the community." See Inland's history: [http://history.gmheritagecenter.com/wiki/index.php/Inland\\_Manufacturing\\_Division](http://history.gmheritagecenter.com/wiki/index.php/Inland_Manufacturing_Division).

Supported enthusiastically by community groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Dayton Art Institute, the Chorus has been described as "one of Dayton's greatest by-products of industry" (from DPO history at <http://www.daytonphilharmonic.com/files/uploaded/DPO70AnnBk.pdf>).

But the Chorus was much more than a local enterprise. The Chorus was staged by Raymond Sovey, a two-time Tony Award nominee and long-time Broadway technical and costume designer. In addition, Deems Taylor—the broadcast "voice" of the New York Philharmonic and well known by music historians as a composer and music critic—narrated and arranged a number of Chorus recordings. The Chorus often performed with the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra, as in the world premiere stage production of Benjamin Britten's "Saint Nicolas" with guest conductor Hugh Ross of New York's *Schola Cantorum* and tenor David Lloyd of the New York City Opera.

### **Inland Chorus Preservation Project**

In 2007, Gerald Alred, a former Chorus member (1951-1959) and professor of English and professional

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writing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, began digitizing Inland Children's Chorus records from his family's collection for himself and his cousin who was also a former Chorus member (1941 to 1947). Through a rare-music blog site <<http://musicyouwont.blogspot.com/>>, he connected with other former Chorus members.

On a June 2009 business trip to Dayton, he organized a lunch with former Chorus members that included himself; Fred Moore, his cousin and long-time member of the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra and Symphony Chorus; Paul Thomas, a 35-year member of the Kim Kelly Orchestra; Jim Thomas, a retired sales executive; and Diann (Thomas) Brown, a homemaker and waitress. The goal of this lunch was to exchange materials and consider how to preserve the music and history of the Chorus.

Based on his thirty years of teaching technical communication, publishing historical bibliographies and authoring widely-acclaimed textbooks in business and technical writing, Professor Alred developed the Web site <<http://inlandchorus.com/>> aimed at preserving and making widely available the history and music of the Inland Children's Chorus. His other goal was to find a permanent institutional home for these materials. For Alred's profile, see <[www.uwm.edu/~alred/profile.html](http://www.uwm.edu/~alred/profile.html)>.

Professor Alred conducted substantial research and received support for the project from Jane Brock Woodall and Craig Orr at the Smithsonian Institution as well as Christo Datini, Lead Archivist at the General Motors Heritage Center. Mr. Datini praised the project for "documenting this portion of GM's history."

Those and other contacts led to enthusiastic interest from Special Collections and Archives, located in the Wright State University Libraries in Dayton, Ohio. Special Collections agreed to a partnership with Professor Alred and InlandChorus.com to collect and to preserve materials related to the Inland Children's Chorus. Wright State also agreed to include the final version of InlandChorus.com as a permanent part of the "Inland Children's Chorus Collection."

Professor Alred urges former members and others to help complete this history by (1) sharing their comments and memories of Chorus at InlandChorus.com, (2) contributing digital versions of photos, recordings, or other materials to the website, and (3) donating original materials to Special Collections and Archives (<http://libraries.wright.edu/special/>). Those with questions or interest should write to [alred@inlandchorus.com](mailto:alred@inlandchorus.com).

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