

Neighbors

Inland Children's Chorus left legacy

Have memorabilia?
WSU will archive it.

By Adele Koehn
Contributing Writer

From 1936 through 1970, Inland Division of General Motors in Dayton sponsored a Children's Chorus for the children of its employees to develop character and enrich the performing arts in the community.

Soon, other children from the age of 8 to 18 were invited to audition for the 100-member chorus. Ideally, the ratio was 50 girls and 50 boys. The girls wore long blue dresses, and the boys looked professional in dark jackets and white shirts.

The chorus became well known through its popular and critically acclaimed concerts, national radio broadcasts and performances on early television. The Chorus frequently performed with the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra; at one time as part of the world premiere stage production of Benjamin Britton's "Saint Nicolas" with guest conductor Hugh Ross of New York and tenor David Lloyd of the New York City Opera.

The first director, Richard Westbrook, a fine musician and taskmaster, died at the age of 44. Joseph Geiger, a local church organist and choirmaster, replaced him. The chorus was ac-

companied by pianist Mary McCash and organist Urban Deger.

Children of the chorus came as second-graders and aged out at 16 or 18. Whole families passed through the musical experience and grew in poise and maturity to face their lives ahead.

Thomas Connair of Kettering, a retired veterinarian, remembers he and his five brothers and their sister, all sang with the Inland Children's Chorus. "We must have inherited good singing voices, but it was always a great day for Mom and Dad when still another offspring passed the audition."

June Albers Lavin of Centerville and her sister, Helen Albers Crotty of Miami Twp., were members from the beginning in 1936 until they left high school. "It was a great experience, and it's fun to look back on those days. I always remember the long blue dresses," said Crotty.

In 2007, Gerald Alred, a Chorus member (1951-

59) and now professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee connected with former chorus members through a rare-music blog. On a business trip to Dayton this past June, Alred organized a lunch with former chorus members to decide what to do with the extensive memorabilia he and others had.

The former members included Fred Moore, a longtime member of the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra; and Paul Thomas, a 35-year member of the Kim Kelly Orchestra, and others.

Alred conducted research and received support for the project from Jane Brock Woodall and Craig Orr at the Smithsonian Institution as well as Christo Datini, archivist at the General Motors Heritage Center.

Datini believed the project would document this portion of GM's history.

All this led to enthusiastic interest from Special Collections and Archives

at Wright State University Libraries in Dayton. Alred and others presented digital versions of photographs, recordings and other materials to the archives at WSU.

"Now that the initial materials are in place, we urge others to contribute their personal Inland Childrens Chorus memorabilia," Alred said.

Toni VandenBos, one of the archivists at WSU Special Collections, may be reached at (937) 775-3991.

Contact this contributing writer at Adeleauk4737@sbcglobal.net.

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