

**Selected Bank Group News** (Posted on August 23, 2002)

## **WB/IMF Choral Society: 44 Years Later, Still Singing Strong**

*Many of the staff who attended or watched the June 27 end-of-fiscal year celebration in the MC Atrium were forcefully reminded of just how good the Bank/IMF choir is. "They sound so professional, it's almost as if one were at the opera," said one Young Professional. They ought to be. The choir has been around since before any YP was born.*

Its current Director, Diana Saez, says the World Bank-International Monetary Fund Choral Society began in 1958 as a Christmas carol group at the IMF, and the following year was expanded to include staff from the Bank. Right from its inception, the choir has been led mainly by staff or spouses with professional music training.



Saez holds a Masters Degree from Temple University in Philadelphia, in choral conducting. Married to Ernesto Cuadra, Lead Education Specialist in HD, she is also the founder and music director of Coral Cantigas, the only chamber choir in the area dedicated to performing choral music from Latin America. She also conducts the Catholic University Women's Choir.

"The mission of the World Bank/IMF chorus is to present high quality performances of choral music and to provide the World Bank-Fund staff with an opportunity to produce beautiful singing in a friendly and creative environment," Saez says.

"Its first director was Dr. Wunsch, the organist and choir master of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception," says Saez, narrating its history. "He was succeeded by Dr. P. M. Jayarajan, Alternate ED at the Fund and violinist with the National Symphony Orchestra, and then by Jack Upper, World Bank staff member and active Washington area musician."

Under its next director, Jean Tarnawiescki, a Bank spouse and experienced choral conductor and cellist, the choir grew to as many as 80 voices and flourished as it extended its repertoire to include Cantatas and Masses by Dvorak, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert and others. Tarnawiescki was succeeded by Joya Cox, and then by Neville Ottley who introduced many popular and contemporary compositions.

After Ottley, Charles Kelley from the Fund took the baton for a few years. He was succeeded by Jenny Bland from the Bank, another active Washington area musician and long-time leader of a madrigal group composed of Bank staff. Bland retired from the Bank and the Choral Society in 1997, and Saez, a Bank spouse, was recruited as the new director. Fabian Faccio is the accompanist and assistant director.

"Right now there are around 34 active members, but I would like to see the choir grow to 100 voices," says the choir director. The singers are all volunteers who work in the Bank

and the Fund, or spouses. The singers are divided into four main sections: sopranos, altos, tenors and basses. Two of the members, Laura Elliot and Lorraine Nagy also take care of all the administrative responsibilities.

Rehearsals are held every Tuesday from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. – except in summer – at the United Church, on 1920 G Street, right around the corner from the headquarters buildings of the Bank and the Fund. "We present two concerts a year, twice each: a Holiday concert and a spring concert," says Saez. "We always repeat the concerts; one in the Bank and one in the IMF."

Saez fondly recalls some of the choir's high moments, such as the December 2000 presentation of the 'Messe de Minuit pour Noel' or Midnight Mass for Christmas by Marc-Antoine Charpentier. "Mr. Wolfensohn came to our performance of that Midnight Mass and sent us a personal note expressing how much he had enjoyed the concert." She remembers that "it was a beautiful performance and we were accompanied by a chamber orchestra."

She says before her arrival, the choir used to perform in nursing homes and hospitals. "That is something I would love to start doing again, but I need to get more people committed to sing with the choir," she says. "The more people we have, the easier it will be to perform around."

Saez sees therapeutic benefits in singing as well. "Singing is the best of therapies, and when we have to work and travel so much, it doesn't hurt to take an hour a week to meet with other colleagues and sing," she says. "Many people come to rehearsal very stressed-out, but they leave feeling much better."

Her long-term goals for the choir are ambitious, but totally realistic. "I would like the choir to represent all the different nationalities that work in the Bank and Fund," she says. "I would like to expand the repertoire and do everything, from folk to classical music, from all periods and in all languages. I want everybody that works in the Bank and Fund to know that there is a choir that represents them and to feel proud about it, even if they don't sing in it."

*Below is a photograph of the choir*

