

Fifty Years of Song: Bank-Fund Chorus Celebrates Milestone

December 5, 2008—When the glorious strains of Handel's *Messiah* ring out through the Atrium, the IMF Gallery, and the IFC Auditorium December 16–18, it will mark the 50th year in a row that the World Bank-IMF Chorus has presented a holiday concert.

Today's 120-voice chorus had its beginning in a group of 15 IMF staff who gathered to sing Christmas carols during the annual IMF Dance. With the encouragement of IMF Deputy Director Charles (Chick) Merwin, they decided to form a more permanent group—and the IMF Chorus presented its first official concert in December 1958.



Bird's eye view of a performance in the MC atrium, December 2004

Diverse Group with a Wide Repertoire

The chorus expanded quickly: in 1959 World Bank and IFC staff were invited to join. Today, membership includes not only staff of the Bretton Woods institutions, but also retirees, spouses and children of staff, and staff from the Bank-Fund Staff Federal Credit Union, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Organization of American States, George Washington University, and the US State Department.

The chorus's repertoire has been as varied as its membership. Concerts over the last 50 years have included Mozart's Requiem, Vivaldi's Gloria, Carl Orff's Carmina Burana, Schubert's Mass in G, and Bach's Christmas Oratorio, as well as semi-staged productions of *Iolanthe* and *The Pirates of Penzance* by Gilbert and Sullivan, an all-Russian concert, opera choruses, Broadway music, and folk songs and Christmas carols from around the world.



Soloists John Pivik, Guillermo Almada, Jane Bloodworth, and Patricia Rogers add texture to the concert in June 2007

Accompanying musicians have included the Bank-Fund Orchestra of staff members, music students from Catholic University and the University of Maryland, and professional instrumentalists from the Washington area.

Musical Directors

In its half-century, the chorus has had 11 directors—some staff members, some professionals in the local music community.

Latin America, and the Caribbean, Diana has won several awards for her contribution to the arts. She is ably assisted by Bank retiree Jenny Craley Bland as assistant music director and rehearsal accompanist.

The current director is Diana Sáez, spouse of the Bank's Ernesto Cuadra. The founder and artistic director of Coral Cantigas, the only chamber choir in the Washington area dedicated to the performance of choral music from Spain,

Diana's energy, enthusiasm, and sense of humor motivate chorus singers to perform at their best. "I feel that the Chorus should be a source of pride for everyone involved with the World Bank and IMF," she says. "After all, the chorus has survived for 50 years in spite of changes in administration, in music direction, and in membership. It has thrived even though its members are so busy, and many travel a lot. I'm proud and excited to be part of this 50th anniversary celebration."

Harmonization of a Different Kind

The chorus's members—whether trained and experienced musicians, or

completely novice singers—find their participation a welcome break from office routine and the daily stress of working in the business of economic development.

According to Guillermo Almada, Senior Resource Management Officer in LCR, “The harmonies and the melodies have an immediate effect on me: I’m renewed!” He adds, “Another angle—and funny the Bank has not picked up on this—singing in a choir is one of the best practices for team building. Regardless of your status and position at work, your input, your voice, is as important as everyone else’s.”

Retiree Helen Toni speaks for many chorus members when she says, “I enjoy singing with all the friends I have made in the chorus over the years.”

Today the chorus rehearses once a week and presents two concerts each year—in December and in the spring—and performs for other events in, and occasionally outside, the Bank, IFC, and IMF.



Diana Sáez conducts a recent performance

Charles Merwin’s Legacy

Charles Merwin, the original sponsor of the chorus, continued to sing in the bass section until the mid-1990s and, even after he retired from singing, regularly attended the concerts with great enthusiasm until he passed away last year.

His vision of a chorus made up of staff, family members, and friends in the World Bank-IMF community is his enduring legacy, and we are grateful to him for this gift of music that lives on more than 50 years after that first performance of ten Christmas carols at the IMF Dance.

This Season’s Concerts

In celebration of its 50th anniversary and of the holiday season, the World Bank-IMF Chorus will sing Part I of Handel’s “Messiah” on December 16 (MC Atrium), December 17 (IMF Gallery), and December 18 (IFC Auditorium). All concerts begin at 1:00 pm. Admission is free. Guests are welcome; visitor passes are required for entrance to the World Bank and IMF.

More information about the Chorus is available on the website: www.wbimfchorus.org.

Contributed by Marisa Diaz (retired) and Patricia Rogers, OPCS



Brass accompaniment to a choral number, December 2005

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