

Chorus Sings for Hope, Peace and Friendship
By SANDRA ARCHER WINKLER & LINDA WRIGHT
Wash., D.C., Correspondents

The Washington, D.C., Chorus is making wonderful friendships. Recent performances have not only inspired audiences but have allowed the performers to deepen their commitment to the mission of achieving peace through song.

After their performance at the U.N. Association–USA’s 1997 National Convention, Vice President for National Programs James M. Olsen told the chorus: “I always have a vision of how these meetings should go, but this year, because of you and your wonderful music, this meeting has surpassed my dream. I hope you could tell by the reception from the audience how much they appreciated your performance.”

Warm responses and positive comments such as this are tributes to years of dedication and hard work on the part of the chorus members. Chorus Administrator Karen Leigh explains that for several years the chorus has struggled with its identity and reason for being. However, during the last two years, the chorus has grown tremendously.

“When I first performed in the chorus I didn’t realize singing was so difficult,” chorus member Troy Roots says. “I knew a little about music and I enjoyed singing, but the practices were real work and very intense.” As a section leader, Mr. Roots calls about 20 men two or three times a month to communicate the schedule and offer encouragement. “People talk with me about difficulties with music and transportation,” he says. “I have to explain last minute decisions and policies — something like a diplomat. I’ve been encouraging them for their development and for the development of the chorus.”

As with the other chorus members, his dedication helps him better reach the audience. “In performing now, I am aware of people in the audience — their expressions — smiling, nodding, crying,” he says. “I feel good that we can touch people like that.” The chorus is definitely a place for personal growth, says Chorus Director Mollene Fowlkes. “Our mission is to support our Buddhist movement for world peace through music,” she says. “Chanting for and striving to achieve that through singing has helped all of us in our individual practice and in all aspects of our lives. We have become stronger as individuals and that is what gives us our joy. We are now interacting with the community and sharing our joy and determination with all kinds of people from all religions and backgrounds. Music is the universal language and our mission is a good vehicle to send the Buddhist spirit of peace throughout the world.”

On June 29, the chorus again spread the message of health, happiness and hope when members sang at the Hospital for Sick Children. They conveyed to the kids that each of them is precious and holds the potential to experience tremendous joy — a feeling that can definitely be obtained if they never give up on their dreams. Children and staff responded by joining in, singing and clapping to the tunes, indicating that message had struck a chord.

The performance was part of a program initiated by the Rev. Rebecca Bentzinger, who recently began holding non-denominational services as the chaplain for the hospital, which is in the same neighborhood as the SGI-USA Washington, D.C., Community Center.

She put out an invitation to local church choirs to sing for the children as part of the weekly Sunday service. An arrangement was worked out to conduct a Buddhist ceremony followed by the pastor’s Christian service.

Interspersed in a medley of songs, chorus members shared inspiring Buddhist concepts.

After the performance, Ms. Bentzinger thanked the chorus, saying that their spirit was appreciated. In a letter, she said: “The patients, staff and families of the Hospital for Sick Children join with me in thanking you for your beautiful musical message of peace and

hope! Sunday can sometimes be a slow day for the children, so having a special musical treat really can lift their spirits. Your commitment and enthusiasm were evident to us all, and we hope that you will return to be with us again! Peace be with you!”

WT

Title: Chorus Sings for Hope, Peace and Friendship
Subject: World Tribune 08/22/97 n.3153 p.5 WT970822p05
Author: Sandra Archer Winker and Linda Wright
Keywords: Chorus Events Exchanges Friendship Hope Meetings National News Peace Sings