


A group of diverse people, mostly in black clothing, are singing and raising their hands in a church or community space. The background is dark with some stage lighting. A large white musical note graphic is positioned behind the title.

# Singing Their Hearts Out

**O**n any given weeknight, in church halls, seniors' centres and community spaces along the Escarpment, folks of all ages are singing their hearts out with other like-minded music lovers, just for the joy of it.

# Along the Escarpment

BY JEANNINE D'ENTREMONT



Burlington's Glee Social Club enjoys the applause, with Emily Daquano, founder and director, in first row, second from right, and Erin Karpriel, far right. PHOTO BY CHRIS PAYNE.



▲ Chorus Niagara and Niagara Symphony Orchestra at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre in St. Catharines, for the first concert of their 60th anniversary season, "JOY!" PHOTO BY MADE BY FRAME

**C**hoirs Ontario, an umbrella organization, says there are 11,300 choirs in the province, mostly church choirs, with 1,243 of them being community or professional choirs. That means almost one in seven Ontarians is a chorister. If you want to sing, there's a choir for you. Choirs range from auditioned, semi-professional groups where the ability to read music is required, to community choirs of varying sizes, the only prerequisite being a love of singing and a willingness to learn and practise.

### St. Catharines' Chorus Niagara

With 80 singers ranging in age

from 18 to 80, St. Catharines-based Chorus Niagara bills itself as Niagara's premier auditioned mixed choir. Their recently-retired artistic director of 35 years, Robert Cooper, received the Order of Canada and is one of the country's foremost choral musicians. Really a family of choirs, Chorus Niagara includes a children's choir and a high school chorale. They perform four concerts a year, as well as a "Singathon" fundraiser. The choir's repertoire includes major classical works, Christmas favourites, and popular, opera and Broadway choruses.

"Singing with Chorus Niagara is the best kind of workout, a challenge

physically, intellectually and emotionally," says Virginia, a member for 10 seasons. "Best of all, I belong to a strong, supportive community." Fun fact: their flash mob video of Handel's "Hallelujah" chorus at a food court in Welland has received over 57 million views! (See it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Xh7JR9oKVE>)

### Burlington's Glee Social Club

For those looking for something completely different, there's Glee Social Club, a 24-member group in Burlington that performs cabaret-style numbers, complete with choreography. Founder and director, Emily Daquano, started the group in

2017 as a project when she was studying for her Masters of Community Music at Laurier.

A non-auditioned group, Glee Social Club blends musical theatre with community choir. They rehearse weekly and put on a couple of shows per year, mostly performing contemporary music in a cabaret style with smaller groups and duets.

"I saw that there was a gap in community music for younger adults in their 20s to 40s," says Emily. "There were lots of musical theatre groups and choirs for older adults, but not as many consistent opportunities that were accessible for younger people." Emily says community singing



▲ Members of Escarpment Singers rehearse at Milton Seniors' Centre. PHOTO BY JEANNINE D'ENTREMONT

▼ Erin Karpiel, centre, performing a small group number with Burlington's Glee Social Club. PHOTO BY CHRIS PAYNE





▲ Members of North Halton Community Singers performing The Supremes' "Stop in the Name of Love" at their Motown fundraiser concert. PHOTO BY BART MANIERKA.

is important because it gives people an opportunity to use their voices and working toward a common goal brings people together.

"Singing is so joyful and spiritually fulfilling and so important for a balanced life," she says. "Everyone should make time for singing."

Glee member, Erin Karpel, 35, has been with the group for three years. She's been singing since she was six years old, starting with a children's chorus, high school musical productions and then community musical theatre. "Emily is a fantastic director," says Erin. "I've made a lot of friends there. It's something I look forward to every week."

### Milton's Escarpment Singers

Another choir option within view of the Niagara Escarpment in Milton is the aptly named Escarpment Singers. It's an all-women choir founded in 2019 by married couple Bob Hall and Melanie Silva, both music teachers by day. Bob is a high-energy musical theatre performer and director. He directs the group and Melanie, an award-winning children's choir director, is the piano accompanist. Rehearsals are filled with joking and teasing.

Bob says the choir's purpose is to have fun first. "Singing in a choir elevates your mood and you're in the

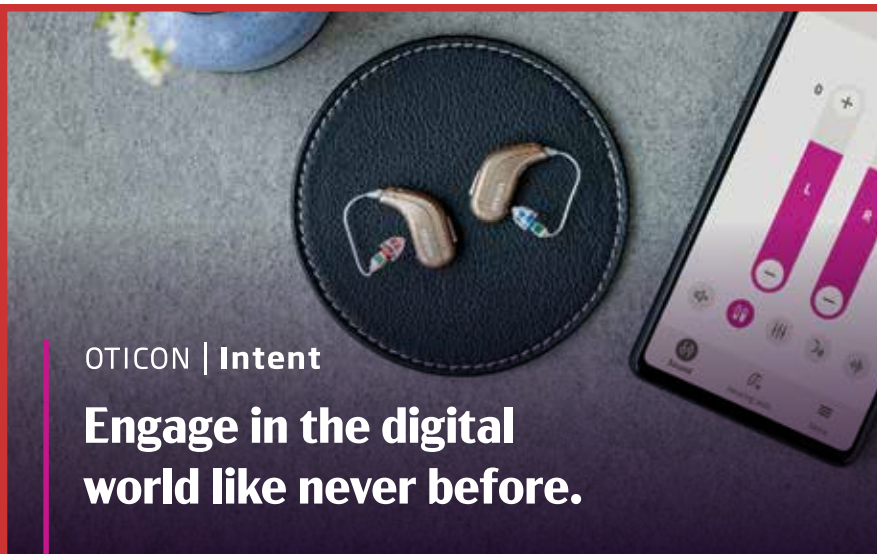
present moment," he says. Melanie concurs. "It's obvious that we're having a good time. A lot of members don't read music. They come back again because they enjoy it."

Beyond the social aspects, singing in choirs is actually therapeutic. A *Globe and Mail* report says SingWell, a Toronto Metropolitan University research project led by Dr. Frank Russo, is studying the effects of singing on people with chronic conditions. "It involves posture, breath control, using your core, coordinating speech and movement. And so, the physical activity of singing is itself therapeutic," he says.

### Georgetown's North Halton Community Singers

For Viktoriia Chylibiiska of Georgetown, joining the North Halton Community Singers (NHCS) was a way to integrate into her new community. In June 2022, she and her two children fled the war in Ukraine and came to Canada, knowing no one but the family that hosted them. Three months later, Viktoriia joined the choir to meet people and improve her English language skills.

"I had never sung in a choir before," says Viktoriia. "Usually, I would sing at home with my father. He loved to play guitar and sing. 'The



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▲ Bob Hall, director, and Melanie Silva, accompanist for Escarpment Singers. Choir members surprised Melanie with cupcakes and balloons for her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. PHOTO BY JEANNINE D'ENTREMONT



▲ Jeannine d'Entremont and Christine Arbic at NHCS's Roaring 20s fundraiser concert. PHOTO BY BART MANIERKA

best thing about belonging to the choir is that I met lots of lovely people, we have fun during rehearsals and concerts and I was able to sing amazing songs.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, NHCS’s membership fell from 86 paying members to 26. Now back up to its previous membership levels, the choir is continuing its mission to share the joy of singing with its choristers and audiences.

### Owen Sound’s Wonderland Singers

The pandemic was also the catalyst for Owen Sound’s Wonderland Singers Zoom choir. Director Coco Love Alcorn, an award-winning professional singer-songwriter, had just started an in-person choir when she had to shift gears. She decided to move the choir’s rehearsals online, but since Zoom doesn’t allow for group singing because of the time lag, Coco had to improvise. Using a “looper,” she recorded herself playing guitar and ukelele and singing harmonies and invited participants to mute themselves while singing along.

“It surprised everyone that it worked so well,” says Coco. More than 700 Wonderland Choir members from across Canada and the U.S., Europe, Australia and New Zealand came together once or twice a week over three years to sing on Zoom. “Music is healing and singing together in community is therapeutic and liberating,” says Coco.

If you’re inspired to experience the joy of singing in a choir, Google “choirs in my area” or check the Choirs Ontario website. **NEV**

*Jeannine d’Entremont is a soprano with North Halton Community Singers. “Seniors Caring About Climate” in Winter 2024-25 was her last feature for this magazine.*



▲ A Wonderland Singers’ sold-out performance at a concert venue in Owen Sound. PHOTO BY MICHAEL MCLUHAN



▲ A screen shot of Wonderland Singers virtual choir with founder and director, Coco Love Alcorn. PHOTO BY JEANNINE D’ENTREMONT



◀ Mark Peterson,  
North Halton  
Community  
Singers' talented  
accompanist at  
their spring 2025  
concert,  
"Sing for Joy!"  
PHOTO BY GARY CRALLE



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