



Angels in our Ears

by Natasha Regehr, alto

As a music teacher, I am engaged every day in the business of helping people to make and appreciate sound. Sometimes our progress seems painfully slow, as we puzzle over the mysteries of reeds, valve oil, and fingering charts. Sometimes it's easy to get lost in these banalities, so that sound becomes a mechanical thing to be operated rather than a living thing to be experienced. It always astounds me when, amidst all the ruckus of an elementary school music room, my students somehow grasp something about the spirit of what we are trying to do together.

Recently I asked these fledgling performers to tell me about themselves as musicians, and I received this unexpected reply: "If I was a musician I would try to do the best of my ability to put on a show that people will never forget. The music I will play will be like little angels dancing in your ears. People will clap for me when I walk on stage and start playing my instrument. I will start small, then get bigger and bigger each time I play. Everyone will gather around me as I play" (Karys Gardiner).

Karys is still coaxing the first few tentative notes out of her instrument, but she understands something about music that is often lost on experienced players. She understands that music is a social act, a practice of gathering, growing and celebrating. And she understands that music is more than a precisely executed combination of rhythms and pitches: it is imagination, pleasure, and whimsy, embodied magically in the sounds of the music-makers. It is "little angels dancing in your ears."

How often, as adults, do we return to the unaffected, unabashed pleasure of filling our ears with delightful sounds? How often do we walk into a room with no other intention but to "put on a show that people will never forget"? Our lives are full of traffic, timetables and to-do lists; how often do we step out of that cycle, and find a space where nothing matters but the simple task of giving and receiving beautiful sounds?

At the end of my teaching day, I often feel depleted, exhausted and overwhelmed. I crave silence and stillness. But once a week, instead of retreating into my quiet little house, I drive downtown for a two-hour choir rehearsal. Another hundred singers do the same thing, putting aside other pressing commitments every Wednesday night for the sake of spending time together with sounds that feed their souls.

And why do we do it? Partly for ourselves, of course. We've discovered the little-known truth that singing together is actually a great deal of fun. But we also do it for you, our listeners. We do it to put on a show that you will never forget, because we want you to come and inhabit the exquisite aural space that is created when passionate musicians gather together to sing. We want to set little angels dancing in your ears, because that's how music works: your pleasure magnifies ours.

Christmas is coming. It's all about shopping and baking and getting stuff done. It's one, big, festive rush, especially for musicians, who seem to spend a disproportionate amount of their year preoccupied with seasonal cheer. But when the moment comes, and we walk on stage to perform for you, we hope that you're filled with a different sort of rush. Maybe it will be the collective energy of singing "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" with a pipe organ, brass band and hundreds of other carolers. Maybe it will be the happy nostalgia of recalling your favourite secular tunes. Maybe it will be the excitement of hearing the world premiere of newly commissioned pieces conducted by the composers themselves, or the thrill of admiration at the virtuosity of the soloists.

For me, the rush will come in subtler tones, through the ethereal mystique of Eric Whitacre's *Lux Aurumque*. You may have heard of his "virtual choir" projects, in which thousands of video submissions from around the world are combined into one mass recording of the same piece of music. It's an amazing story about the growing, gathering power of music in the digital age. But even without the backstory, Whitacre's composition is four minutes of pure, breathtaking choral sound, aptly set to a Latin translation of Edward Esch's tenderly reverent poem:

*Light,
warm and heavy as pure gold
and the angels sing softly
to the new-born baby.*

You must come, if for no other reason than to hear these angels dancing and whispering in your ears.

November 24, George Street United Church, 7:30 pm: Gather round.

Purchase tickets online at www.peterboroughsingers.com or by telephone at (705)745.1820. Tickets will also be available at the door.