

## entertainment

■ **MUSIC:** Peterborough Singers member writes about Beatles experience

# Inspiration, imagination: Long and

**NATASHA REGEHR**

Special to The Examiner

I had been asked for an imaginative piece about "the power of the collective human spirit," and I was stumped. "How inspirational," I had thought blithely. "How simple. How dull."

I had had my fill of inspirational rhetoric after ever so many months of slogans about dreaming big, corporate dreams and carrying unquenchable Bombardier torches. What to do?

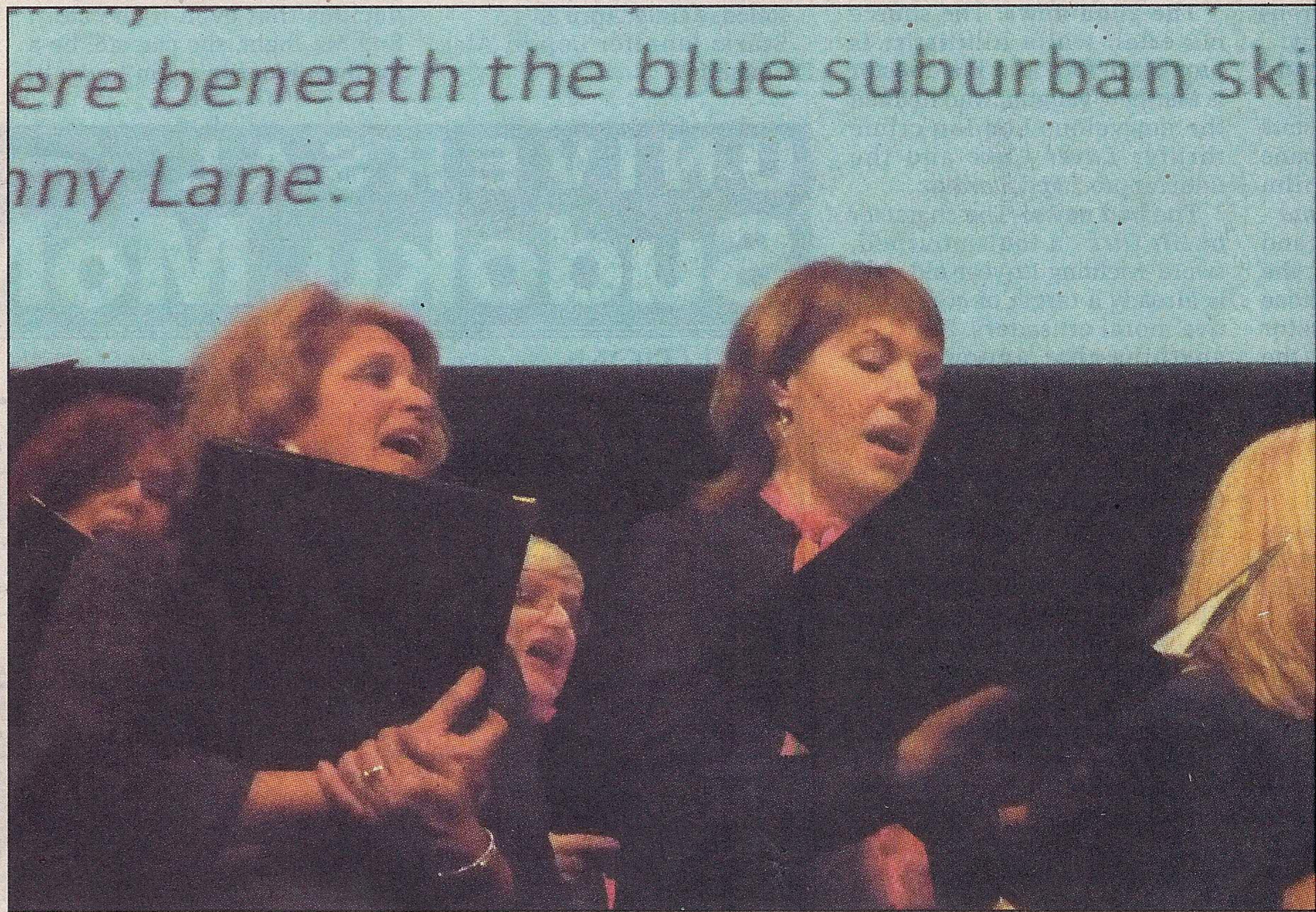
My moment of inspiration came to me through the unexpected avenue of pop culture. Now I am, by nature and by upbringing, a cultural elitist. I grew up on Haydn and Beethoven, and my attitude towards pop culture has always alternated between derision and apathy. I admit that this snobbery positions me squarely in the margins of mainstream society; I do have my niche, however, in the choral scene, and within that niche, giants like Handel and Bach sweep all things contemporary safely to the margins of our collective experience.

Imagine my dismay, then, when the artistic director of my choir announced one day that we would be singing an all-Beatles concert in February. "What has come over him?" I gasped. "Maybe this is the time to take a year off," I considered. "Well, at least I won't have to practice," I shrugged.

Two things happened over the coming weeks. First, my assumption about the simplicity of the music proved untrue. "This music may actually have some substance," I conceded, as I sat at my piano and plunked out the ridiculously syncopated doo-doots and wah-wahs. I felt like a broken metronome.

The second thing that happened was that I realized I was having something I would later refer to as fun. During rehearsals, I found myself bouncing and bobbing ever so slightly as I sang. I might have accidentally smiled a time or two. When I got home, I noticed I was still singing, not just that evening, but days later, and, worse, that I was liking it. These tunes had gradually attained the status of "real music" in my carefully ordered artistic world, and the lyrics, to me, occasionally resembled something akin to poetry.

Well, the concert day arrived, and 100 classically trained singers proceeded onto the stage with matching black folders stuffed with Beatles tunes; at



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**Members of the Peterborough Singers at the Beatles concert.**

intermission we snuck away like so many mischievous schoolmates and changed into our deliberately boisterous '60s-wear, much to the delight of our audience.

I had, in the past, had my most profoundly moving musical moments in the hands of Bach and Mozart, and here I was in go-go boots and a miniskirt, singing with all truthfulness that "because the sky is blue it makes me cry."

It did make me teary, not just that the sky was blue, but that it could be described so with such beautiful tonal intensity, with chords that I didn't think pop musicians even knew (shame on me!)

It made me teary that these four flippant boys were aware that there were Eleanor Rigbys and Father McKenzies in the world, and that there was loneliness and death and futility built into the system: and it humbled me to realize that these silly-looking teenagers could express that awareness in such a way that 50 years later, a startled chorister would feel the sadness of it emanating from the same universe as any Mozart *Lacrymosa*.

What shocked me more, however, was that a song with a title like *Hey Jude!* Would emanate from the same musical universe as the *Hallelujah Chorus* - but it

did.

During our encore, we left the stage to infiltrate the singing crowd, and they smiled at us in our outrageous outfits, and we clapped our hands and smiled back, every human spirit in the concert was singing its own Amen - what did it matter that the syllables we intoned were modified to "na, na-na, na-na-na, na?"

There was an unmistakable connectedness in the room, an awareness that that in our loneliness and in our giddiness alike we were together, not just with one another, but with all those who had loved this music in the past and would live it in the future; in fact, we were together even with people like me who had never heard of it at all.

There was a certain power in this collectivity, a certain ease and innocence that reminded us that optimism and levity still have a place in our incorporated world. In fact, I confess that the very next day I did a little dance in my living room when Crosby scored his golden goal, and it might just be that in some pop-induced way, that dance was Beatles-inspired - imagine that.

*Natasha Regehr is a member of the Peterborough Singers, an auditioned community choir under the direction of Syd Birrell.*



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# inment

## : Long and winding road

suburban skies...



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