

# Peterborough Singers

## Dance Envy

by Natasha Regehr

When I was a little girl, I begged for ballet lessons, and got piano lessons instead. As an adult, I revived my childhood ambitions through catastrophic excursions to various belly dancing and ballet classes, and then wisely traded my cute little dance outfits for the sedate dignity of a choir robe. I devoured the scales and sonatinas of my youth, and the cantatas and oratorios of my adulthood, but I never quite forgot the primal draw of the body towards the rhythms and movements of the music I loved.

Recently my dance envy returned in earnest as I watched choreographer Rachel Bemrose rehearse with her newly formed Peterborough Dance Collective. They were preparing for our upcoming performance of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*,

and they were hot. While waiting for their turn to perform, the dancers were scattered along the edges of the studio, reclining gracefully in various unnatural positions. But when they took to the floor, these people sizzled. One moment they were heaving, panting, and hoisting one another skyward; the next they were twirling and freezing in trance-like ecstasy. Bodies moved under, over, around, and through one another like some kind of acrobatic kaleidoscope.

The performers were precise, professional, and intensely focused, but at the same time, they seemed to vibrate with energy and exuberance. They laughed freely and exclaimed incredulously that Rachel's choreography was "impossible"—and then they did it anyway. I watched in covetous

awe. At one point I accidentally applauded. And then, suddenly, the rehearsal ended and the dancers became regular teenagers who ate donuts, did math homework, and probably didn't want to go to school the next day.

A few weeks later, I walked on stage and wondered at my good fortune at being invited to perform with this troupe of pulsating heartthrobs. No, they didn't persuade me to root through my closet in search of my coin belt and pink tights. I was one of many inconspicuous choristers in the background, dressed in concert black and disappearing meekly behind my choir folder. But don't be misled by our somber attire; for what these dancers did with their bodies, we did with our voices. After all, *Carmina Burana* is a festival

for the ears as well as the eyes, and can only be truly appreciated when the visual antics of the dancers are coupled with the aural sensation of a hundred-voice choir.

It was only natural, then, that the Peterborough Dance Collective would team up with the highly regarded Peterborough Singers to bring Orff's "scenic cantata" to the stage. It was a dream partnership between some of the city's most talented directors. Under the able stage direction of Geoff Bemrose, Rachel drew from her dancers the stunning effects that Syd Birrell drew from his singers, and the result was electric.

*Carmina* was not new to the Peterborough Singers repertoire; it was part of the choir's first season with guest conductor Elmer Iseler, and has appeared on several concert programs since then. Our regular audience members were therefore prepared for the dramatic quality of the music, with its raucous percussion, chirping maidens,

and explosions of choral sound; but now, in our twentieth season, we brought Orff's masterpiece to life with pirouettes and pyrotechnics. This was choir like the city had never seen it before, making music that could be seen and heard and smelled and touched, emanating from a stage strewn with storytellers and bards. Together, we brought the bawdy poetry of the Middle Ages to the concertgoers of Peterborough, and we hope some day to do it all again. Join us, and resurrect the dance envy in you.



Natasha Regehr has over fifteen years of experience as a music teacher in private and public elementary schools, and works as a freelance writer for various publications and private clients.

## Submissions deadline January 30

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