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Meet Your Section Leaders

Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass: Who's the fairest of them all?

Do you know who your section leader is? Ah, of course you do. But do you know the other three? Read this, and then you will. And that will be a good thing, because – well – you might just find that the people on the other side of the rehearsal room are not the ogres you think they are.



Susan McKnight
soprano Section Leader

First, there's **Suzi Soprano**, our poet laureate and rah-rah raffle girl. Everybody knows Suzi. Or thinks they do. Let's take a closer look. Suzi joined the Peterborough Singers 15 years ago when she and Syd met at their children's nursery school: "Syd convinced me that even a single mother of two very young boys could make it all work – and we did and I am forever grateful."

And she most certainly does "make it all work," from singing over 100 *Messiah* concerts to devising and implementing an endless sequence of seating plans, according to a mysterious algorithm that only she and Syd can fathom. How does she do it, you ask? Well, the musical brilliance (have you heard her spin off those 16th note runs?) comes from a long history of piano lessons, voice lessons, and choral singing in school and community choirs. Her dad played in the University of Waterloo Symphony and she somehow found her way into the Conrad Grebel choir at the age of

six, later joining the Kitchener-Waterloo Philharmonic Choir as well.

And the social and organizational wizardry? Suzi didn't tell me where she got that vibrant spirit, but she puts it to good use every day as a Community Liaison at the Kawartha Regional Memory Clinic. In fact, she bears the title of "#1 Networker" at her job – are you surprised? I'm not.

When she's not networking or singing, she enjoys gardening, cooking, theatre, reading and walking – all decidedly ordinary activities, except that Suzi also claims to make a hobby of "laughing" – an admirable skill that you will often hear her exercising on Wednesday nights in tandem with the other two Loud Soprano Laughers (can you guess who they are? I thought so).

Like many of us, Suzi has big dreams. Close to home, she'd like to (re)sing the Bach *Magnificat* and the Dvorak *Stabat Mater*, and do a workshop and gospel concert with Brainerd Blyden-Taylor. She'd love to spend a day being pampered in New York, and a month with her family exploring the countryside outside her imaginary Italian villa.

But on a grander scale than that, “Super Sue” dreams of bewitching all of us lesser choristers by wiggling her nose “so that everyone would know their music and would know where to stand and it would all be just perfect!”



Poets Johanna, Suzi and Ray

Speaking of perfect, Super Sue once told me that if I wore sparkles she would correct the spelling of my name on the seating chart, and I have been diligently sparkling ever since.



Moving down an octave or so, we come to the alluring **altos**: the exotic, yet stalwart core around whom the rest of the choir adoringly rotates. Heading this illustrious group is **Johanna Bousfield**, our resident comedienne and nitpicking book nerd.

Johanna Bousfield
Alto Section Leader

Oh? You didn’t know she had a head for detail behind that jovial exterior? It’s true. She’s a Senior Quality Assurance/Quality Control Coordinator at SGS Minerals Canada (“formerly Lakefield Research if you’re wondering what the heck”). She’s been there for eighteen years and has “dabbled in everything from assay lab through mineral processing through hydromet through mineralogy.” Whatever does all of that mean? I don’t know. You’ll have to ask her. All I know is that I’m impressed.

Like Suzi, Johanna likes to garden, but she also has an unnatural attraction to obscure television shows about sharks and those who catch them. She has a long history of musical involvement, beginning as a six-year-old church chorister (“I think my parents signed me up in response to my general inability to shut up”), and then spending four incredible years with the Toronto Children’s Chorus. She is an “overly right-handed” instrumentalist with

Newbie News

Any advice for newbies?

Suzi: Embrace the experience – good or bad. If you are not used to choral masterpieces, be prepared to be blown away, as there is nothing finer to perform – and you are in for a treat with the BACH! Be sure to involve yourself in other aspects of the choir as well – these are all AMAZING people!

Johanna: Hang on to your hats and do your homework! It’s a quick-thinking crowd. That said, it’s a very helpful and caring crowd who will help you learn and support you all the way.

Rick: Don't be intimidated; you will discover that despite a broad spectrum of experience within the choir, when we sing, it evens out and everyone's contribution is par... but along those same lines... try not to 'stick out'!

Grade 9 Piano, Grade 2 Theory and three years of high school violin. Johanna sings with the All Saints’ Anglican Church choir, and confesses that she “illegally sings soprano descants at Christmas.” She is also “casually dabbling in singing lessons with Pam Birrell and Laura Pudwell as they try to teach me to stop breathing like a moron.”

Johanna is a relative newbie to the Peterborough Singers, having joined us in 2011, but she is already making a splash on the Board of Directors in her new role as Membership Coordinator and general Smart-Person-to-Have-Around. She loved last year’s Quartetto Gelato concert, especially the moving final verse of Amazing Grace, and she hopes to once again sing Vaughan Williams’ *God Bless the Master* as she did every Christmas with the TCC. She’d also like to see Scotland and England, and eliminate bad driving everywhere.

Much more important, however, is her scheme to live out the perfect day: “My husband, George Clooney, and I would wake up in our villa on Lake Cuomo and spend the day puttering around quaint Italian villages and lounging by the water. We would philanthropically throw around our gobs of money to organizations all over the world (to justify our having gobs of money) and end the day at a fancy dress ball.” Sounds good to me. Let’s start shopping now.



Rick Hilts

Tenor

Section Leader

And then comes **Rick the Tenor**. Quiet, unobtrusive Rick, married to the not-so-quiet, curly-maned, flute-wielding Barb Hilts. But don't be deceived by Rick's gentle demeanor. I happen to know that he is an avid Facebook stalker, and possesses a highly funky mind.

He is the only one of our section leaders whose occupation I actually understand, and he is the only

school custodian I know who writes music for schools, weddings, baptisms, funerals, and – get ready – “organ donation recognitions” and “integrated literacy promos.” Not bad for a self-taught guitarist and keyboardist, who claims to have “no formal instruction (gasp!).”

He joined the Peterborough Singers just in time to sing the Y2K *Carmina* concert, and has fond memories of singing *Earth Mass* at Millennium Park – “sort of a ‘not-so-random’ random act of culture which the Singers brought to the city.” He'd love to sing a dramatic Canada Day program made up of “Canadian folk songs accompanied by occasional vignettes,” and when he's done that, he would like to eliminate greed and implement a global program of distributive justice: “by that I mean, for everyone in the world to have ‘enough,’ and I know that is a tall order. No one government can fix it... so my perfect day starts when that starts!”

Rick is an enthusiastic parent and grandparent, and has a strong interest in “anything eco-related” that promotes a “partnership between people and mother earth.” He also has a quick wit, a generous heart, and a hefty collection of comical family photos – everything you could possibly want in a tenor, and more!



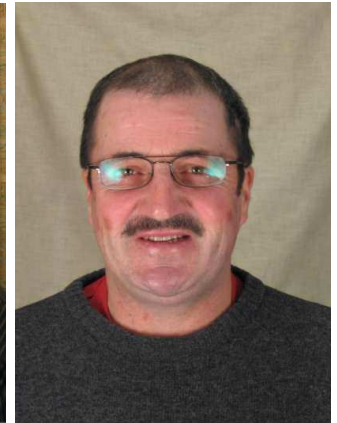
Rick's Weird Family



Fred Huffman

Bass

Section Leader



Not Fred Huffman

Finally, at the bottom of the **basses**, we find **Fred Huffman**, who, for the greater part of the year, I thought was another Fred, until Ray kindly redirected me.

Fred, it seems, is the only mature one of the lot, sagely remarking that each section of the choir is, in fact, equally important. Don't believe him. Johanna knows better.

Like Johanna, Fred has a career history that makes my head spin and my eyes glaze over. He worked for Alfa Laval, A-L Stainless and Falco Stainless for fifty (yes, *fifty*) years, and then did some consulting work for Harco Enterprises until he retired in 2008. And what sort of work did he do? He started in drafting, and later became a Supervisor of Estimating and Timestudy, Supervisor of Customer Service and Estimating, and head of Ontario Sales. I have no idea what he estimated, studied or sold (something stainless, I presume), but I bet he'll tell you if you ask.

He'll also tell you that he has musical training in voice and clarinet, and has performed with the St. James Players and the Peterborough Citizens Band (now the Peterborough Concert Band). Fred joined the Singers in 2003 so he could sing a complete *Messiah* concert, after singing excerpts in school and church choirs for many years. This year's *Messiah* concert was one of the best, according to Fred, who says that “each year at the end of the season I think, wow, how can we top that? And each year we seem to go a notch higher.” His favourite Peterborough Singers memory is the 2007 trip to Winchester Cathedral in England, and some day he would love to see St. Petersburg in Russia. Maybe we should start planning another concert tour.

So there you have it: four fearsome sections and their four fearless leaders. Now go say hello to one of them. If you kowtow once or twice, they hardly bite at all.

Section Wars

Which section is the best, and why?

Soprano

Suzi: Well, Sopranos, without question – we are, after all, the divas. . .

Tenor

Rick: The Tenor section is the best, but I don't state that for the obvious reason; our positioning allows us to take in the full effect of all of the harmonies and we get to fully appreciate it (I will tactfully add the word 'usually'). On occasion there are squeaks and groans, but nary a few whispered expletives; please note there is a quiet generosity from the fellow tenors, in fact, within the entire choir... that I cannot describe. Forget what I said about who's best; not a fair question, Natasha!

Alto

Johanna: Of course Altos are the best because we're frighteningly clever and stunningly beautiful but most of my affinity for this section comes from the music itself. While there are some dreadful alto parts consisting of "D- D D D--- D D D D D D E D...", we often get to dance around the melody and play with some funky accidentals. We get to add the "spice."

Bass

Fred: My unbiased opinion would have to be the Bass, as it is the foundation of a choir, but really all sections are important to give the full sound that we have achieved.

Weigh In: Are you shocked, offended or inspired by these fighting words? Send your comments to singerstories@gmail.com, and make *your* voice heard.

Seriously, Though: Why We Sing

What makes the Peterborough Singers worth your time?

Suzi: Music makes me whole – singing with this group helps to fill my love of singing, and being with the wonderful people I get to sing with fills my soul!

Johanna: I'm having a ball and am so glad that I finally tried out. It's so exciting to be challenged and sing such a variety of styles of music. I love my church choir and we do wonderful things but obviously the repertoire cannot be as expansive as the Singers. This, combined with all of the wonderful people who I now call friends, makes me feel that I've taken a major evolutionary step and my world has expanded so much. For that I am grateful.

Rick: There is a children's book with a quote that stuck in my head years ago: "If a thing's worth doing, it's worth doing well." We don't really see it, but perhaps we feel it, as week by week, concert by concert, year by year, we better ourselves in music delivery and appreciation. Definitely worth it!

Fred: It is the satisfaction that I feel after a concert when you realize the level of professionalism that we as a choir achieved. It is a wonderful feeling to be part of such a group.

Respectfully submitted by Natasha Regehr, with the kind endorsement of the interviewees and powers-that-be. Tune in next time for "Meet the Board," "Meet the Newbie," and various other amusing tidbits.