

Retirement town

Cantata opportunity too good to pass up for newcomer

The Cantata Singers have the same voice they did last year, but they have a brand new face. Barbara Parker came to Prince George less than six months ago, just long enough to learn a bit about the premier vocal ensemble in the city, just as both Cantata directors announced they were taking the year off. Gerda Wilson needed study time to complete her masters degree in music while Broek Bosma has taken a year-long position in Switzerland to study conducting. It was a perfect opportunity for Barbara and the Cantatas to meet.

Barbara's resumé made her a shoe-in for the interim director's chair. She studied pipe organ and voice at the University of Wisconsin, completing a degree in music technology with an emphasis on sound synthesis performance.

From post-secondary she went on to a life of directing choirs, private tuition, instrumental accompaniment, vocal soloing, adjudication, clinics, and also used music to work with special needs kids. She came here from Colorado and had no intention of parachuting into the Prince George music community, but she just couldn't pass up such a chance.

"I came up here to retire. Everybody tells me you are supposed to move away from Prince George for that, but I love it," she says. "It's beautiful and away from urbanization. When I was young, my family was from Manitoba and I grew up on the farm out in the middle of nowhere, where community mattered. Here I



Barbara Parker

feel that closeness again. I'm up on Cranbrook Hill, but my kids still have the mall and everything you need is here. It's a perfect place to retire."

But is it the perfect place to resurrect a music hobby akin to a career?

"I hadn't intended to come up here and do anything like his, but in the music world it's hard to put it away," she says. "I missed the choir work and playing, so it's nice to do it again. I also took the position as the new organist / pianist for St. Michael's church. It's nice that I am retired; I can devote myself to these things and I can still have my time with my family and my other interests. I don't have to share that with a job."

The Cantata Singers, in the right hands, are potentially a whole job to administrate. Their season is testa-

ment to their ambition and skill as a chorus. Anyone in the director's position could potentially overwhelm themselves just living up to the standards set by Broek and Gerda. They are currently preparing for an autumn concert, a Christmas concert in December, their charity fund-raising Gospel Jubilee in February and the big event is Mozart's *Requiem* together with the Prince George Symphony Orchestra on March 10 and 11.

"That's a very demanding work so I'll be concentrating on that quite a bit," Barbara says. "This fall we will be getting acquainted. It always takes a while to develop a rapport and a trust. As far as programming, the fall concert will be a potpourri, a variety of different styles. With the major Mozart coming up, and me just taking the position, I don't have the time to develop a theme-oriented program."

Barbara only arrived in April and so has not had a chance to hear the choir live, but she has heard many recordings of the group. She thinks the choir is at such a level already that her role will be only to further their progress into a precision singing unit. Finding that elusive sound of oneness that every group strives for. She also senses that this is a group open to new repertoire, so she would like to introduce new composers who may not have sung before.

New members are always welcome to the Cantata Singers fold. Rehearsals for the new season commence on September 12. The group is based at St. Michael's Church downtown.

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▼ From B1

Always need for helpers

Although northern hawk owls are not uncommon in the area, they are usually only passing through.

This is not at all their breeding grounds, which is why the local naturalist club has seized on this particular bird. The discovery of a northern hawk owl still in the down is evidence of possible northern hawk owl breeding in this area. It is the first time such activity in the Prince George area has been in any way confirmed. It could mean anything from a fluke to a sign of climate change.

"Where we are now is their winter range. He is right where he should be for this time of year. But he was not where northern hawk owls usually are in June," says Rachel.

That is why the cameras were chattering away as Chad hoisted the owl up on his gloved hand and tossed him into the air of freedom. The owl dipped and cut corners all across

the marsh, then quickly settled on a branch as if to sit and think about his newfound open spaces.

Soon, though, he was circling around the wetland and building up an appetite.

The Northern Raptor Preservation Society has dealt with over 150 cases this year, and each year they increase their totals. They have been in operation since 1998, taking in injured birds of prey and other beasts who need a haven to mend. They are on-call 24 hours a day, seven days a week all year long. Winter months are slow for such activity, although cars do strike birds and poisonings sometimes occur that require their assistance. In the meantime they are busy with fund-raising, facility maintenance and gathering a volunteer base. There are six on their board of directors and another nine society members. More are welcome. To contact them call 962-0015.

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