

Choral community going strong

Ten years and counting for N.K based Winnipeg Children's Choir

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NORTH KILDONAN

Singing in a choir can be a magical experience. Just ask choir director Judy Neufeld Urbonas.

"Music speaks to me," Urbonas said. "I know what I got out of choir as a child. And when I started working with the other choir, I know what I got out of that as well."

For the past 10 years, Urbonas has been the director of the Winnipeg Children's Choir, with the assistance of her daughter Kimberly Lind. Prior to that, Urbonas was the assistant director of the Winnipeg Mennonite Children's Choir under founder Helen Litz, who ran the choir for 50 years before stepping aside in 2008.

"When she was going to stop, I thought if I could give one kid the experience I had, it would be worth it," Urbonas said, adding that Litz passed on the choir's extensive library of music.

Both Urbonas and Lind sang in the choir as children, starting when they were eight and nine years old, respectively.

"At different times," joked Lind.

When Urbonas took over direction of the choir in September 2008, she changed the name to reflect that the choir's membership had diversified from its Mennonite roots.

"We have had children coming from all parts of the city and from out of town," Urbonas, who is currently serving as president of Associated Manitoba Arts Festivals and vice-president of the Federation of Canadian Music Festivals, said. "They're all welcome."

The Winnipeg Children's Choir meets Tuesday evenings for two hours each week at the North Kildonan Mennonite Church (1131 Roch St.) to rehearse and build upon a wide repertoire of choral selections.

"We do a wide variety of music," Urbonas said. "A lot of folk, a lot of classical music. We also do a lot of sacred music."

"We try to make up a quite extensive list of songs every month, a mix of songs they already know, songs they're



Supplied photo

Over 50 students have been a part of the Winnipeg Children's Choir in the 10 years the choir has been performing. The choir, which rehearses every Tuesday at the North Kildonan Mennonite Church (1131 Roch St.), is open to new members.

already working on and songs that are new," Lind added.

"They're always growing, always learning something new but also coming back and reinforcing."

The choir performs a number of times throughout the year, and often travels to take part in music festivals. The choir has sung with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's annual *The Nutcracker* performances at the Centennial Concert Hall for the past 10 years, and has even appeared in a pair of Hallmark holiday films.

"We also have a wonderful group of alumni who come out and help us when we need something extra," Urbonas said.

Currently, the choir is accepting new members. Urbonas

and Lind are also in the planning stages of organizing a 10th anniversary concert for the choir, tentatively scheduled for May 4, 2019. They're inviting any alumni from the choir to take part.

"You get a real sense of community with choral singing," Urbonas said. "I still meet people I was in the children's choir with. We'll talk about something, then start singing parts of a song. The friendships continue. You may not see these people for years, but the friendships continue. There's such a bond through the music."

For more information on the Winnipeg Children's Choir, visit www.wpgcc.ca