# PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF CHORAL SINGING: SOCIAL, INTELLECTUAL, AND EMOTIONAL ASPECTS OF GROUP SINGING

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# ABSTRACT

This research sought to explore the meaningfulness of belonging to a choir. Members of 14 Canadian choirs (N= 404) responded to 18 statements concerning the perceived benefits of choral singing. Choristers ranked six aspects of choral singing in the following order of importance (from greatest to least): musical, intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual. An in-depth analysis of three central areas of the choral experience (social, intellectual, and emotional) was done and six sample populations were compared: paid vs. volunteer choristers, choristers living in different areas (urban, suburban, and rural), choristers with a music degree vs. non-degree, age of choristers (young adult, middle-aged, and senior), choir size (large, medium, and small), and type of choir (community and church).

Results showed that choristers in small choirs felt like valued members of their choirs, felt a positive connection with the other choristers, and that singing in choir raised their mood to a significantly higher degree than choristers in medium and large choirs. Significant findings showed that volunteer singers, to a greater extent than paid singers, found that choir raised their mood, helped them to relax, and was a satisfying experience which gave them a sense of accomplishment. The differences in responses between middle-aged and senior choristers were minimal, but both gave responses that were significantly higher when compared with young adult choristers. The older singers felt that singing in choir raised their mood, helped them to relax, provided them with a sense of accomplishment, and that there was a sense of unity within their choir more so than young adults.

# RÉSUMÉ

Cette recherche a tenté d'expliquer l'importance significative de faire partie d'une chorale. Des personnes membres de 14 chorales canadiennes ont répondu à 18 questions portant sur les avantages qu'ils perçoivent de leur participation dans cet ensemble. Les personnes interrogés ont placés par ordre d'importance six aspects du chant choral : musical, intellectuel, émotionnel, physique, social et spirituel. Une analyse détaillée de trois parties importantes de l'expérience de chant au sein d'une choral (sociale, intellectuelle et émotionnelle) a été réalisée sur six échantillons qui ont été comparés: choristes payés ou bénévoles, habitants en milieu urbain ou rurale ou dans une banlieue, leur formation musicale (diplômés ou non), leur appartenance à groupe d'âge (jeunes adultes, adultes d'âge moyen ou personnes âgées), la grandeur de la chorale (grande, moyenne ou petite) et le genre de chorale (communautaire or religieuse).

Les résultats obtenus ont démontré que les choristes qui font partie de petites chorales se sentaient plus appréciés par les autres membres, qu'ils ressentaient davantage un lien positif avec les autres et que le fait de chanter dans une chorale améliorait plus leur humeur, et ce, de façon nettement plus marquée que les choristes appartenant à des chorales moyennes ou grandes. Des résultats significatifs ont démontré que les chanteurs bénévoles ont senti davantage que le chant améliorait leur humeur, qu'il les aidait à relaxer et qu'il était une expérience enrichissante qui leur permettait de s'épanouir à un niveau plus grand que celui observé pour les chanteurs payées. Les réponses différaient peu entre les choristes d'âge moyen et âgées mais celles des jeunes adultes étaient

iii

nettement inférieures. Les chanteurs plus âgés ont senti davantage que le fait de chanter dans une chorale a amélioré leur humeur, les a aidé à se détendre, leur a procuré un sentiment d'épanouissement et que cette expérience leur a donné un sens d'appartenance à leur chorale.

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v

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

ABSTRACT
RÉSUMÉ
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
LIST OF TABLES
INTRODUCTION
Introduction
Purpose
Choosing a Setting
REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH
Social Benefits of Choral Singing
Intellectual and Achievement Benefits of Choral Singing
Emotional Benefits of Choral Singing
Physical Benefits of Choral Singing
Spiritual Benefits of Choral Singing
Musical Benefits of Choral Singing
Necessity of the Present Research
Research Questions
METHOD
Subjects
Survey Instrument
Procedures

RESULTS	S	.6
Ra	anking of the Benefits	17
Su	ummary and Ranking of the Statements	8
Ch	hoir Size	9
Pa	aid vs. Nonpaid Choristers	21
De	egree vs. Non-Degree Choristers	22
Ar	rea of Residence	22
Ag	ge of Choristers	23
Ge	ender of Choristers	24
Ту	ype of Choir	25
A	dditional Comments Given by Choristers	25
DISCUSS	SION	26
Re	esearch Question 1	26
Re	esearch Question 2	32
Li	imitations of the Research	41
Fı	urther Research	42
C	Conclusion	43
APPEND	DIX	
А	. MESSAGE FOR THE RECRUITMENT OF SUBJECTS	44
В	CHOIR QUESTIONNAIRE	45
C	C. CONDUCTOR INFORMATION SHEET	49
D	D. RESEARCH CONSENT FORM	50

E	2. ADMINISTERING THE QUESTIONNAIRE	1
F	C. CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY	;3
REFERE	ENCES	54

# **LIST OF TABLES**

TABLES	
1.	5-point Likert- Scale for Questionnaire
2.	Important Benefits of Singing in a Choir
3.	A Summary of the Statements (Emotional, Social, and Intellectual) 18
4.	Overall Ranking of the first 12 Statements
5.	Responses for Small, Medium, and Large Choirs
6.	Responses for Paid and Nonpaid Singers
7.	Responses for Rural, Suburban, and Urban Residents
8.	Responses by Age: Young Adult, Middle-Aged, and Senior 24
9.	Responses for Type of Choir: Church and Community

ix

# Introduction

The power of group singing is apparent to anyone who has ever joined voices with others, whether at a sporting event, around a campfire, at a party, or at a religious service. The emotions evoked by group singing affect people greatly. Furthermore, becoming involved in organized group singing activity, such as a choir, can deeply influence people in many ways. The perceived benefits of belonging to such a musical group are varied and numerous: musical, social, emotional, psychological, cognitive, and spiritual, in addition to the enhancement of the physical and mental health of singers. Many types of musical group activities, including string quartets, symphonies, concert bands, marching bands, and brass quintets, may be beneficial as well, but being part of a choir is a unique experience that is unparalleled. Silber (2005) sums up this phenomenon:

While any group musical endeavour can be an exercise in interpersonal skills, multi-part singing, with its particular demands, generates a wide range of interrelational dynamics in a unique way. One might say that the multi-vocal ensemble is a metaphor for relationship, where the individual is called upon to control her own voice, and at the same time blend with the voices of others in balance and with appropriate dynamics. This delicate balance requires both personal skillsself-control, patience, 'finding' one's voice, self-expression, intuition- and the relational skills necessary to produce a harmonic whole in negotiation and cooperation with a diverse group- listening, yielding, trusting (as for other voices to come in) sharing and supporting." (p.253-54) Choristers often become enthralled by the music, their own distinctive voices, and with the voices of their fellow singers. The choral experience has been defined as an "interaction between a singer and a piece of music within a group setting under the guidance of a conductor" (Robinson & Winold, as cited in Cohen, 2005, p.17). Choristers create a singing community, not unlike a family in which each person contributes to the function and development of the group and where each member is continually encouraged, appreciated, respected, and valued. Choirs may become a gathering place for individuals looking to find a niche for themselves and to participate in a musical experience that involves collaboration with others.

In choral groups, people from all walks of life join together to attain a common goal. It is a collective experience. Choirs are made up of singers of diverse ages, religions, backgrounds, cultures, abilities, and careers, but they all fundamentally share a common commitment and desire to make music. Through cooperation, perseverance, and with the vision of a mutual goal and sense of common concern, participation in a choir shows that rewarding and beautiful music can be created.

Individuals seek to devote their time toward something they find meaningful because without meaning, minimal learning can take place. If an activity is not meaningful to someone, he or she is not likely to develop interests, attitudes, passion, or concerns toward it; they are likely to be ambivalent and indifferent. In the last decade some research has been conducted on the meaningfulness of belonging to a choir. Most studies came to the same conclusion: belonging to a choir enhances a chorister's personal well-being (Bailey & Davidson, 2002 and 2005; Beck, Cesario, Yousefi & Enamoto,

2

2000; Clift & Hancox, 2001; Cohen, 2005; Willingham, 2005). Many interpretations exist as to the definition of one's well-being and how it may be enhanced. The present study explores the non-musical benefits of choral singing, specifically the emotional, intellectual, and social benefits.

Two moving and thoughtful comments made by respondents of the present study sum up the benefits of choral singing: "Choir has run like a thread through my life, giving me solace, relaxation, challenge, confidence, and joy. I would be a completely different person without it." and "Music is therapy and singing in choir provides us with a connection to our community, a sense of well-being and it brings perspective to our lives." These outlooks help in understanding why so many people choose to spend their free time participating in this unique musical activity.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this investigation was to explore the meaningfulness of belonging to a choir. Choristers (N= 404) from community and church choirs across Canada replied to a questionnaire. They responded to statements on the perceived benefits of choral singing. The present study provided an in-depth analysis of three central areas of the choral experience- social, intellectual, and emotional- and also discussed the physical, spiritual, and musical elements of choral singing.

### **Choosing a Setting**

Being a chorister myself, I was interested in the value of the choral experience for individuals and their perceptions of the meaningfulness of such an experience. I wanted to understand more fully the perceived benefits of group singing and why people committed time and energy to this activity. The first step in my investigation was to choose a population to survey. After poring over the relevant literature and taking into consideration the types of choirs in my area, I settled on researching community and church choirs. These types of choirs were abundant in my area, which was advantageous for me as there were many choirs to choose from for this research.

My research follows in the footsteps of Clift and Hancox (2001), Hylton (1981), and Stollack, Stollack, and Wasner (1991), in which a questionnaire was given to many choristers with the hopes of determining the perceived benefits of choral singing. I also benefited greatly by exploring the qualitative findings of Bailey and Davidson (2002, 2005), Cohen (2005), and Silber (2005), who researched marginalized groups of singers, from female prisoners to homeless men, and how group singing affected them.

# **Review of the Research**

#### Social Benefits of Choral Singing

The feeling of belonging and working with others toward a mutual goal is rewarding. It has been found that choral singing gives individuals the sense that they are part of something bigger than themselves and are contributing to a worthwhile endeavour (Bailey & Davidson, 2002 and 2005). The sense of unity and cooperation (Anshel & Kipper, 1988; Cohen, 2005; Faulkner & Davidson, 2006), and the connection made with others (Cohen, 2005; Stollack, Stollack, & Wasner, 1991) are just some of the reasons that individuals participate in choirs. Studies show that people who join choirs find them enjoyable and fun (Buchanan, 1998), make new friends and develop interpersonal relationships (Blandford & Duarte, 2004), meet diverse people, and spend time outside of choir rehearsals with fellow choristers (Clift & Hancox, 2001; Durrant & Himonides, 1998; Hylton, 1981). Choirs have been found to provide strong social support systems (Bailey & Davidson, 2005) and singing together in harmony "appears as an almost natural way of being and relating, fulfilling basic needs for vocal collaboration and social connectiveness" (Faulkner & Davidson, 2006, p.231).

The research done by Willingham (2005) focused greatly on the idea of choir being a community and a place where people gather together. The social aspects of a community were evident, and even through difficult situations and tensions, group members were supportive and encouraging of one another. He called it a social experience with a focus, a community which values the sharing of the love of music.

There is a sense of teamwork, of interdependency, of pulling together and...people in this community care and take responsibility for each other's wellbeing. There is safety in striving for excellence in this community, and there is a shared sense of quality in performance, and quality or depth of experience. As in all communities, there are tensions. People bring anxieties, personal issues, strained relationships, loneliness, shyness, and in some cases, their own sense of inadequacies... (but, individuals) believe they are able to achieve more collectively than they can individually (p. 9). Research done by Pitts (2004) analysed interviews with performers attending a 'Gilbert and Sullivan (G&S) Festival' and the results suggest that individuals found the social and musical features contributed equally to their enjoyment of, and dedication to, membership in their G&S activities. The members perceived each other as being "diverse in experience and background, but fundamentally similar in a commitment and desire to make music amongst friends" (Pitts, 2004, p.158) and their loyalty to the group was strong. The friendships developed and maintained during rehearsals went hand-in-hand with the collective endeavour and personal fulfilment felt during performances.

## **Intellectual and Achievement Benefits of Choral Singing**

In choral singing there is constant feedback regarding notes, pitch precision, rhythms, diction, blend, balance, and the formal structure of the music. Each time a song is sung new information is conveyed, which must be retained so that it can be applied in subsequent performances. Research shows that singing in harmony with others is not an easy feat and requires highly developed levels of listening, vocal control, intuition, and coordinated behaviour control, not to mention the understanding and executing of the musical aspects (Bailey & Davidson, 2002; Faulkner & Davidson, 2006). This type of learning can result in a sense of achievement, satisfaction, progress, and an increase in self-esteem and confidence. With regards to the intellectual and achievement benefits, many choristers feel challenged and stimulated intellectually by singing with a group. They find it to be a satisfying experience and one that gives them a sense of accomplishment and an increased feeling of self-worth (Cohen, 2005; Hylton, 1981). Hylton (1981) examined students' perceptions of the meaningfulness of choral singing by administering a questionnaire to 673 high school choral students. Six dimensions were ranked for their meaningfulness and the results were ranked as follows: 1) Achievement, 2) Musical-Artistic, 3) Integrative (Social), 4) Communicative (with audience members), 5) Psychological (Emotional), and 6) Spiritual. Many choristers commented on the achievement benefits received from choral singing and felt that music provided them an opportunity to succeed and improve in a non-competitive situation, all the while helping them to discover their own identity. The self-esteem that resulted from one's musical achievement "contributed greatly to an individual's sense of well-being, resulting in feelings of accomplishment, success, and pride" (Hylton, 1981, p. 296).

#### **Emotional Benefits of Choral Singing**

Research shows that choristers enjoy singing in choir and feel as though choral singing improves their mood (Davis, Kenny, & Unwin, 2002), brings joy and happiness to their life (Hills & Argyle, 1998; Willingham, 2005), and allows them to relax (Clift & Hancox, 2001; Durrant & Himonides, 1998). An interesting comparison was made for emotional responses between amateur and professional singers and it was found that amateurs reported increasing joy and elatedness after singing, whereas professionals did not. However, both groups did feel more energetic and relaxed after singing, but singing seemed to promote more well-being for amateur singers (Grape, Sandgren, Hansson, Ericson, & Theorell, 2003).

Singing has also been shown to promote well-being in marginalized singers (Bailey & Davidson, 2002 and 2005; Cohen, 2005; Silber, 2005). In 2002, Bailey and Davidson conducted a qualitative study with choristers from a homeless men's choir. Seven men interviewed and the emotional benefits that they received from this musical outlet appeared to be astounding. They all felt that singing within a group promoted their emotional well-being, and that the power of music created a second life for them. There was an emotional connection established between the members themselves and between the director and the members. When performing, there was a strong emotional connection between the audience and the members. Homeless people generally are alienated from regular social settings and this performance milieu helped with their personal validation. They felt that by performing they could bridge the social gap that separated them from others. The loneliness and isolation that some of these men felt were helped by singing and they felt an increase in self-esteem and a readjustment of self-concept. As well, singing helped these men experience joy, pride, hope, and happiness.

Current research has been conducted on the effects of choral singing and immune system response, specifically, the changes in Secretory Immunoglobulin A (S-IgA) levels when singing. S-IgA is an immune system protein which is responsive to an individual's emotional state (Rein & McCraty, 1995). Increased levels of S-IgA have often been observed during positive and/or relaxing experiences and decreased levels during stressful and/or intense experiences (Green & Green, 1987; Stone, Cox, Valdimarsdottir, Jandorf, & Neale, 1987). The research by Kreutz, Bongard, Rohrmann, Hodapp, and Grebe (2004) found that choir singing led to an increase of S-IgA levels, suggesting that emotional affect and immune competence are both positively affected by choral singing. Beck et al. (2000) conducted a similar study, which produced the same results. They took this research one step further and developed a 28 Likert-scale questionnaire, called the 'Singers Emotional Experience Scale' (SEES), which measured emotional reactions to singing. It was administered to a professional choir and the results showed that choral singing had positive emotional, as well as social, physical, and creative, outcomes. Specifically, choristers felt that singing made them happier, exhilarated, and filled with strong emotions.

#### **Physical Benefits of Choral Singing**

Participation in musical activities has been reported as promoting physical wellbeing. Physical problems subsided and aches and pains, such as arthritis and chronic pain, were alleviated to a certain degree when participating in musical activities (Kenny & Faunce, 2004; McCaffrey & Freeman, 2003; Siedliecki & Good, 2006). Equally important to singers was their improved mental state during active participation in group singing and other musical activities. These activities appeared to help people battling with depression and other mental illnesses (Bailey & Davidson, 2002; Bradford, 1990; Koga, 2001; Siedliecki & Good, 2006).

A 2001 survey by Clift and Hancox delved into this area. It consisted of an openended questionnaire in which participants were given the chance to comment on the physical advantages of singing. Many reasons were mentioned repeatedly: improves breathing, exercises lungs, strengthens diaphragm, exercises abdominal and chest muscles, and develops good posture.

9

## Spiritual Benefits of Choral Singing

The spiritual benefits of choral singing are very difficult to measure. The word 'spiritual' itself is interpretative and means something different to every individual. On a basic level it "encompasses a sense of meaning, purpose and transcendence in human experience beyond the purely physical and mundane realities of life" (Clift & Hancox, 2001, p. 250). Some religious choristers did find the spiritual benefits meaningful, reasoning that singing gives people a spiritual message and it allows singers to show off the potential God gave them (Hylton, 1981). Spiritual benefits also included being uplifted, causing one to think about religion, history and culture, and enhancing one's religious beliefs (Clift & Hancox, 2001).

An interesting outlook on music and spirituality came from the research of Hills and Argyle (1998) in which the two experiences, musical and spiritual, were compared. There were some clear similarities found between the two: both can evoke powerful and intense emotions, both have elements that are private to the individual, but that occur in a public social context, such as a worship service or choral concert, and both have been found to produce positive moods. The results of the study found that of the 11 items surveyed, nine produced greater intensity for the musical experience, six of these reached significance. The most prevalent items included: feeling uplifted, taking part in a shared performance, and joy and elatedness.

## **Musical Benefits of Choral Singing**

Individuals participate in choir for a number of reasons, but the most widespread of these is musical. There are an abundance of choirs with varying degrees of skill, from amateur to professional. There are choirs with different voices- male, female, mixed- and that sing in numerous types of harmony from two-part to eight. One can find a choir that matches to a musical style that one prefers, be it musical theatre, gospel, or classical, a choir of a particular size, or in a certain area. As well, choristers have the liberty of choosing a choir that practices on a particular evening or for a certain length of time. In almost all cases, the musical benefits are of the utmost importance. Much of the research attempted to determine extra-musical reasons why people keep singing, though it is certain that these are important, it is clear that people choose choir because it is an accessible, inexpensive, and enjoyable way to participate in a music making experience. If a person chooses to spend their leisure time singing with a choir, it is because they want to develop their musical knowledge and because they want to sing (Buchanan, 1998).

The men surveyed in Faulkner and Davidson's (2006) study were very serious about the choral experience and its musical benefits. Eleven amateur male singers, who perform frequently and in 4-part harmony, were interviewed and their level of musical commitment and their ideals for harmony were obvious. The importance placed on cooperation and collaboration was admirable, as was their dedication to work together as a team, but all of this was done to attain the highest level of musicianship. Excellent choral singing and peak aesthetic experiences were achieved by these men. Individuals in this group heard how their voice sounded in "relation to others like them and in relation to different voices" (p. 231). They found an ideal balance between both and a personal space within the choir as a whole.

11

The high-school students in Hylton's (1981) survey ranked the musical aspects of choral singing second in a list of six meaningful aspects. They felt such participation afforded them opportunities for musical growth, development of their own musicianship, and heightened perceptions of musical phenomena. Other benefits mentioned included the enrichment of musical knowledge, control of the voice, improved ear training, appreciation of all kinds of music, learning of new pieces, and the discovery of styles and patterns in music.

### Necessity of the Present Research

There has been little research done using questionnaires involving large numbers of choristers, which measures the benefits of choral singing and the research that has been done is not extensive.

The present research requests much demographic information from each participant and from that examines and compares various and diverse sample populations, from the size and type of the choir to the gender and age of the choristers. Three key areas of choral singing (social, emotional and intellectual) are analysed thoroughly and three other areas (physical, spiritual and musical) are discussed as well. None of the previous research done in this area explored so many topics in such detail.

Specifically, this research investigates the following questions:

1 How did the choristers rank, in order of importance, the six aspects (social, emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual, and musical) of choral singing? How do the rankings from this research compare with previous research? What comments were made by the choristers?  Using the results from the three main areas surveyed
(emotional, intellectual, and social), are there significant differences in results between sample populations? Specifically:

a) paid and volunteer choristers

b) choristers from rural, urban, and suburban areas

c) choristers with and without music degrees

d) young adult, middle-aged, and senior choristers

e) choristers from community and church choirs

f) choristers from small, medium, and large choirs

# Method

#### **Subjects**

Subjects (N= 404) for this study were paid and unpaid choristers from choirs in Canada, all of whom volunteered their time to complete this questionnaire. In an attempt to create a representational sample, choir directors from various community and church choirs were sent an e-mail message (see Appendix A) describing the study and requesting permission to survey their choir for it. Directors expressing interest in having their choir participate were given the choice of administering the questionnaire to the choir on their own or having the researcher attend a rehearsal and administering it to the choristers. Fourteen choirs from three Canadian provinces were surveyed.

## Survey Instrument

The questionnaire addressed the perceived emotional, social and cognitive benefits of group singing. It was developed by the researcher and reviewed by experienced university music educators, graduate music students, and musicians. The first step for creating the questionnaire was to formulate lists of possible statements for each topic (emotional, spiritual, and so forth). About 100 statements were constructed. Some were taken from previous research and others were created by the researcher. Three main topics were established (social, intellectual, and emotional) and statements were rewritten to reflect these topics. Redundant, ambiguous, and irrelevant statements were removed. An equal number of statements were created for each of the three topics surveyed.

The first draft contained 26 statements and a half-page of demographic information. The statements were in both negative and positive form and the statements for each topic were interspersed. After three revisions and extensive pilot testing, the fourth and final questionnaire was created. It consisted of demographic information (age, gender, area of residence, whether the respondents are a paid or unpaid member of their choir, and whether or not they have a music degree), which was followed by 18 statements. There were four statements for each of the three main topics (emotional, social and intellectual). The final six statements dealt with the importance of six general aspects of choral singing- social, emotional, spiritual, musical, cognitive/intellectual, and physical. After extensive piloting, it was felt that the 18 statements were clearer and easier to interpret and to understand when in the positive form, rather than mixing positive and negative statements throughout the questionnaire. Therefore, the 18 statements in the final questionnaire are all positively stated, thus making the

14

questionnaire clear and concise. Participating choristers responded to the 18 statements using a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' Table 1 shows this scale.

#### Table 1

#### 5-point Likert-scale range for questionnaire

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

The respondents were also given space and time to respond further to any of the statements and to make any additional comments. (see Appendix B for the questionnaire). The director of each participating choir filled out a 'Conductor Information Sheet' (see Appendix C) in order to classify choirs by size and type.

#### Procedures

The researcher visited eight choirs in Montreal and surrounding areas. Questionnaires were administered during the breaks at regular weekly rehearsals. The researcher read the 'Research Consent Form' (see Appendix D) and made any necessary clarifications. The questionnaires were handed out to each willing participant, and were available in French and English.

Seven directors wished to administer the questionnaire themselves, so the appropriate number of questionnaires was mailed to each of them. Directors also received a set of instructions outlining the process for administering the questionnaire (see Appendix E), the 'Conductor Information Sheet', the 'Research Consent Form', and a self-addressed stamped envelope in which to return the questionnaires. Questionnaires were sent to three choir directors in Prince Edward Island, two in Toronto, one in Montreal and in Nova Scotia. All were returned to the researcher, except the ones sent to the Nova Scotia director.

# Results

There were 419 choristers from 14 choirs who were surveyed. A total of 404 choristers willingly completed the questionnaire giving it a 96.4% response rate. Analyses of the results were done using independent t-tests with a predetermined alpha level of .05 employed to indicate significance. Confirmation of the perceived benefits of choral singing was found, with choristers agreeing that singing in choir benefited them in six different areas: musical, intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual. The degree to which they believed they benefited is depicted in Table 2.

# Table 2

# Important benefits of singing in a choir

ITEMS	MEAN (min=1;max=5)	SD
Importance of musical aspects	4.60	0.62
Importance of intellectual aspects	4.27	0.79
Importance of emotional aspects	4.11	0.82
Importance of physical aspects	3.96	0.95
Importance of social aspects	3.80	0.94
Importance of spiritual aspects	3.74	1.20

The questionnaire included four statements related to each of the three main areas of research. Table 3 outlines the emotional, social, and intellectual statements rated by the participants.

17

# Table 3

# A summary of the statements (emotional, social, and intellectual)

ITEM	S	MEAN (min=1;max=5)	SD
Emotic	onal	(IIIII 1,IIIux 3)	
	1. Singing in choir raises my mood.	4.63	0.56
	2. I find singing in choir to be an emotionally moving activity.	4.45	0.68
	3. Singing in choir helps me to relax.	4.34	0.79
	4. Singing in choir is fun.	4.62	0.58
<u>Social</u>			
	5. I feel rewarded socially by participating in choir.	4.14	0.89
	6. I feel a positive connection to other choristers through my involvement with choir.	4.19	0.76
	7. Singing in choir provides the opportunity to make new friends.	4.16	0.77
	8. There is a sense of unity within our choir.	4.22	0.75
Intelle	ctual		
	9. I feel stimulated intellectually by choral singing.	4.30	0.79
	10. I find singing in choir to be a satisfying experience.	4.65	0.55
	11. Singing in choir gives me a sense of accomplishment.	4.50	0.64
	12. I feel like a valued member of my choir.	4.20	0.79

The analyses of these 12 statements show that the emotional statements ranked

highest, with intellectual statements interspersed throughout, and all the social statements

fell to the bottom of the list. Table 4 shows the overall ranking of these 12 statements.

### Table 4

Statement	Type of Statement	Mean
10. Satisfying experience	Intellectual	4.65
1. Raises my mood	Emotional	4.63
4. Fun	Emotional	4.62
11. Sense of accomplishment	Intellectual	4.50
2. Emotionally moving activity	Emotional	4.45
3. Helps to relax	Emotional	4.34
9. Stimulated intellectually	Intellectual	4.30
8. Sense of unity	Social	4.22
12. Valued member	Intellectual	4.20
6. Positive connection	Social	4.19
7. Make new friends	Social	4.16
5. Rewarded socially	Social	4.14

## **Choir Size**

Choirs were categorized as small (less than 20 singers), medium (21 to 44 singers), and large (more than 45 singers). Many responses from choristers in small choirs differed significantly from choristers in medium and large choirs. Choristers from small choirs rated to a significantly higher degree that "Singing in choir raises my mood," "I feel a positive connection to other choristers through my involvement with choir," and that "Singing in choir provides the opportunity to make new friends" than other choristers. Also, the smaller the choir, the more "sense of unity" and "feeling like a valued member" were felt. Lastly, choristers from smaller choirs showed to a

significantly higher degree that they felt "rewarded socially by participating in choir" compared with choristers from large choirs.

There were only two significant differences found between medium and large choirs. Choristers from large choirs felt "stimulated intellectually" more than choristers from medium choirs, and choristers from medium choirs felt that choir was a "satisfying experience" more than choristers from large choirs (see Table 5).

## Table 5

Statement	Mean for small choir	Mean for medium choir	Mean for large choir	p value between small and medium	p value between medium and large	p value between small and large
Raises my mood	4.87	4.64	4.60	< .05	-	<.03
Emotionally moving	4.55	4.43	4.45	-	-	-
Helps to relax	4.57	4.35	4.31	-	-	-
Fun	4.74	4.65	4.58	-	-	-
Rewarded socially	4.48	4.16	4.08	-	-	<.05
Positive connection	4.67	4.22	4.11	<.01	-	< .01
Make new friends	4.50	4.18	4.10	<.04	-	< .04
Sense of unity	4.82	4.33	4.05	<.001	<.001	< .001
Stimulated intellectually	4.26	4.19	4.40	-	<.01	-
Satisfying Experience	4.61	4.71	4.60	-	< .04	-
Sense of Accomplishment	4.43	4.52	4.48	-	-	-
Valued Member	4.57	4.23	4.13	<.05	-	<.02

Responses for small (<20), medium (21-44), and large (45+) choirs

# Paid vs. Volunteer Choristers

Volunteer singers' ratings for many statements were higher than paid singers' ratings. Significant findings showed that volunteer singers found that choir "raised their mood," helped them "to relax," and was a "satisfying experience" which gave them a "sense of accomplishment" when compared with paid singers. The volunteer singers also indicated, to a greater extent than paid singers, that there was a "sense of unity" within their choir. The one statement that paid singers gave a more favourable view toward and which created a significant difference when compared with volunteer singers was that "Singing in choir provides the opportunity to make new friends" (see Table 6)

## Table 6

### **Responses for paid and volunteer singers**

Statement	Mean for Paid	Mean for Volunteer	<i>p</i> value between paid and volunteer
Raises my mood	4.29	4.66	<.001
Emotionally moving	4.34	4.46	-
Helps to relax	3.83	4.39	<.001
Fun	4.57	4.63	-
Rewarded socially	4.14	4.14	
Positive connection	4.32	4.18	-
Make new friends	4.41	4.14	<.05
Sense of unity	3.97	4.24	<.05
Stimulated intellectually	4.38	4.29	
Satisfying Experience	4.32	4.68	<.001
Sense of Accomplishment	4.03	4.54	<.001
Valued Member	4.24	4.19	

#### **Degree vs. Non-Degree Choristers**

A large percentage (18%) of the choristers surveyed had a university or college music degree. There were two questions in which they differed very significantly from choristers without a music degree and both questions concerned the intellectual benefits of choral singing. Compared with the music degree holding respondents, non-degree respondents felt strongly that choir is a "satisfying experience" (p < .01) and that it gave them a "sense of accomplishment" (p < .01).

## Area of Residence

When analysing the emotional benefits of choral singing, suburban-area singers found choral singing to be an "emotionally moving activity" that helped them "to relax" more so than urban-area singers. Rural residents found that "singing raises my mood" more than both other groups, but the difference was significant only when compared with urban residents.

On the intellectual and achievement side of choral singing, choristers from the suburbs felt more strongly than choristers from urban areas on two accounts: "I find singing in choir to be a satisfying experience" and "Singing in choir gives me a sense of accomplishment." Choristers from rural areas felt much more like a "valued member of their choir" compared with suburban and urban choristers.

When considering the social benefits of belonging to a choir, urban-area singers felt that "Singing in choir provides the opportunity to make new friends" more so than suburban-area choristers (see Table 7).

## Table 7

Statement	Mean for rural singers	Mean for suburban singers	Mean for urban singers	p value between rural and suburban	p value between suburban and urban	p value between urban and rural
Raises my mood	4.77	4.67	4.56	-	-	<.05
Emotionally moving	4.55	4.51	4.37	-	<.05	-
Helps to relax	4.49	4.42	4.23	-	<.03	-
Fun	4.67	4.65	4.58	-	-	-
Rewarded socially	4.26	4.10	4.16	-	-	-
Positive connection	4.33	4.12	4.22	-	-	-
Make new friends	4.31	4.05	4.23	-	< .02	-
Sense of unity	4.33	4.13	4.28	-	-	-
Stimulated intellectually	4.24	4.38	4.23	-	-	-
Satisfying Experience	4.71	4.72	4.57	-	<.01	-
Sense of Accomplishment	4.45	4.57	4.43	-	<.04	-
Valued Member	4.50	4.17	4.16	<.02	-	<.02

## Responses for rural, suburban and urban residents

# Age of Choristers

Choristers were divided by age into three groups: young adult (18-34 yrs), middle-aged (35-59 yrs), and senior (60+). The middle-aged and senior choristers did not differ much in their responses between each another, but there were five statements on which their ratings were significantly higher than young adult choristers: "Singing in choir raises my mood," "Singing in choir helps me to relax," "There is a sense of unity within our choir," "I find singing to be a satisfying experience," and finally, "Singing in choir gives me a sense of accomplishment." Young adults felt that singing in choir provided the opportunity to "make new friends" more so than both other groups (see

Table 8).

# Table 8

# Responses by age: young adult (18-34 yrs), middle-aged (35-59 yrs), and

senior (60+)

Statement	Mean for Young Adult	Mean for Middle- aged	Mean for Senior	p value between Young Adult and Middle- aged	p value between Young Adult and Senior	p value between Middle- aged and Senior
Raises my mood	4.41	4.69	4.66	<.001	< .01	
Emotionally moving	4.33	4.50	4.47	-	-	-
Helps to relax	4.07	4.36	4.39	< .03	<.02	_
Fun	4.66	4.60	4.65	-	-	-
Rewarded socially	4.12	4.05	4.23	-	-	-
Positive connection	4.21	4.16	4.20	-	-	-
Make new friends	4.37	4.13	4.12	<.04	< .05	-
Sense of unity	4.00	4.25	4.27	<.04	< .03	-
Stimulated intellectually	4.30	4.27	4.32	-	-	-
Satisfying Experience	4.43	4.68	4.70	< .01	<.01	-
Sense of Accomplishment	4.21	4.54	4.55	<.01	<.01	-
Valued Member	4.13	4.20	4.22		-	-

# **Gender of Choristers**

There were only two significant differences between genders. Females rated two statements higher than males: "I find singing in choir to be an emotionally moving activity" (p < .02) and "Singing in choir is fun" (p < .01).

#### **Type of Choir**

The two types of choirs surveyed in this study were church and community. Four significant differences were observed between these groups. Community choir singers rated three items to be significantly higher compared with church choir singers: "I find singing in choir to be a satisfying experience," "Singing in choir helps me to relax," and "Singing in choir gives me a sense of accomplishment." Church choristers, on the other hand, found that singing in choir provided the "opportunity to make new friends" to a stronger degree than community choristers (see Table 9).

#### Table 9

Statement	Mean for Community	Mean for Church	<i>p</i> value between church and community
Raises my mood	4.65	4.49	-
Emotionally moving	4.46	4.38	-
Helps to relax	4.39	4.02	<.001
Fun	4.63	4.58	-
Rewarded socially	4.14	4.11	-
Positive connection	4.18	4.27	-
Make new friends	4.11	4.48	<.001
Sense of unity	4.25	4.04	-
Stimulated intellectually	4.28	4.41	-
Satisfying Experience	4.70	4.31	< .001
Sense of Accomplishment	4.54	4.16	<.001
Valued Member	4.21	4.08	-

#### Responses for type of choir: church and community

## **Additional Comments Given by Choristers**

The questionnaire stated "If you would like to further explain any of your answers feel free to do so in the space provided. Any additional comments would be greatly appreciated". A total of 138 of the 404 choristers (34.2%) chose to make comments at the end of the questionnaire. This open-ended statement led to many choristers commenting on their own choral experience and how it affected them. The length of the choristers' comments varied from one sentence to twelve sentences. Choristers were welcome to reflect on any aspect of choral singing and because their comments varied a great deal, it is difficult to categorise them into specific topics. The vast majority of comments were about the positive aspects of singing, everything from how choir changed a person's life spiritually to how singing in choir helped a person to get through a depression to how it kept their brain sharp.

# Discussion

The content of the data collected suggests that group singing resulted in many benefits. This comes as no surprise, since evidence emphasizes choral singing as a leisure activity that people choose to do, and therefore some type of personal benefits would be expected. There were two parts to this research, the first included the ranking of six aspects of choral singing and the second analysed, through the comparison of various sample populations, statements about the perceived emotional, social, and intellectual benefits of choral singing. Throughout the discussion, comments given by choristers will be used to help clarify and further support the findings.

<u>Research Question One:</u> How did the choristers rank, in order of importance, the six aspects (social, emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual, and musical) of choral singing? How do the rankings from this research compare with previous research? What comments were made by the choristers?

The results of the first part of the research showed that choristers surveyed ranked six aspects of choral singing in the following order of importance: musical, intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual. The majority of choristers surveyed felt very strongly that the musical benefits were of the utmost importance, but the level of agreement for the remaining five areas varied. The standard deviation (SD) for each of the six main benefits showed an interesting trend. The SD for each benefit increased the lower down on the list it occurred, the SD for musical benefits was 0.62 and for spiritual benefits was 1.20. The level of variance from the mean demonstrated that there was more agreement for the responses which were ranked higher on the list compared with responses ranked lower on the list.

Only two articles from the research reviewed, compared aspects of choral singing with each other: Hylton (1981) and Clift and Hancox (2001). The ranking of the six dimensions surveyed in Hylton's research were: achievement, musical, integrative/social, communicative, psychological/emotional, and spiritual. The ranking of the four benefits surveyed in Clift and Hancox's research were: social, emotional, physical, and spiritual. The comparisons between the present research and previous research are made below, along with chorister comments for each of the six aspects.

*Musical:* It is not surprising that the musical benefits were ranked first. Singing is a musical activity and choristers are there because they enjoy music. Their interest lies in developing their vocal range and strength, learning to read music, learning about musical styles and history, and about music theory and harmony. Several choristers offered insight on this, commenting that "I appreciate the voice training I receive during the

rehearsals and performances" and that "Choir lets us develop our general musical culture, considering different repertoire, styles, languages, interpretations and vocal technique." One singer in particular focused on the history of the music and expressing the composers' musical intentions:

I love to sing in choirs because of the beauty and inspiration of the music and the connection with the composers who seemed to have been so inspired to write such beautiful music. We are linked to the people by their music and should try to do our best to perform their works so as to express what they wished to tell the world.

The ranking of musical aspects as most important is very similar to Hylton's (1981) research, where it ranked second on six. This result is also mirrored in Buchanan's (1998) research where 730 non-music majors were surveyed on factors that were influential to their participation in choral ensembles. An open-ended question showed that 72% of participants listed their love of singing/music as the primary reason for singing in the choir.

*Intellectual:* For many choristers choir is a pastime that keeps their brain sharp and stimulated. Intellectual benefits ranked second in the present research and this result, like the musical benefits, mirrors Hylton's (1981) research in which choristers ranked the intellectual/achievement benefits highest. Choristers in the present study were attracted to learning other languages, having to read music and words at the same time, memorizing musical pieces, improving their short term memory, and understanding theoretical aspects. Some comments offered by choristers were: "Since I am a prolific reader and a writer, this (choir) is where I find my intellectual stimulation," "Choir helps push back the aging process by working the brain as we read music," and "All musical performance transports me to another intellectual level."

Other choristers enjoyed the fact that the choral experience was personally satisfying in terms of setting and attaining goals and that it provided them with a sense of accomplishment. One chorister described this by saying, "It is very rewarding to be part of such a successful choir. I feel quite proud to be part of it." These comments are paralleled by choristers in much of the recent research in this area (Bailey & Davidson, 2002 and 2005; Cohen, 2005; Faulkner & Davidson, 2006; Silber, 2005).

*Emotional:* The next area of importance was emotional. Emotions cover a broad spectrum of feelings, from enjoyment to relaxation. The area is extensive and it is mentioned in practically all of the research in this field, although its ranking varies depending on the research. In the present study it ranked third. It ranked second of four in Clift and Hancox's (2001) study and fifth of six in Hylton's (1981) research. Some choristers surveyed in the present study felt that singing with a choir put them in a different headspace compared with their careers and other weekly activities. Others felt that choir took them away from their concerns and worries. Choristers made some profound comments on the emotional advantages of singing: "Singing in a choir is a group activity that gives a lesson in sharing and humility" and "I have found that since my husband died it has provided me with as emotional outlet and helped me on the road to normality again."

*Physical:* Physical benefits were ranked fourth in this research and third of four in Clift and Hancox's (2001) study. Many comments were made with regards to the physical benefits of choral singing. Choristers commented that singing is "Good for my health, especially my asthma," "My back and stomach muscles feel stronger from singing in choir," "and "Because of my pulmonary problems, singing in choir is vital to me."

Despite the absence of questioning respondents on the mental health benefits, many mentioned them in the additional comments section. "Choir acted as an important mental health boost following depression" and "It helped me to get out of a depression" are just two of the many remarks made with regards to mental health. Choristers also felt that singing in choir was an effective therapy for stress and that it acted as a natural healer to distress. It was also mentioned that choir is "a wonderful challenge that stares off senile dementia" and that "Choral singing is therapeutic, enriching, and wards off Alzheimer's." The benefits toward mental health were also represented in a few leading research articles in this field (Bailey & Davidson, 2002; Bradford, 1990; Koga, 2001; Siedliecki & Good, 2006). In general it was felt that, "Singing is good for the soul and body."

*Social*: Ranking second to last were social aspects. This was surprising because other studies (Clift & Hancox, 2001; Hylton, 1981) corroborated the notion that the social aspects of choral singing were very important. In the present study, responses and comments about the social aspects of choral singing were varied, with both positive and negative comments mentioned by choristers. Some of these comments included: "It is the

group effect that I appreciate when singing in a choir, to realise a common project in harmony.", "Very little social time is associated with this choir. Because of the size and various ages of choristers, the crowd is somewhat 'clique-y'.", "Singing in the choir has helped me to get through difficult times and my best friends not only sing in the choir, but were met through the choir.", "I am in choir for the perfection of sound and not for the social aspect.", and "We have a wonderful, joyous experience in our choir. We adore the director and enjoy each other's company. We meet socially after rehearsal and discuss much beyond music."

One area of research in which the social benefits are consistently ranked high is with marginalized choristers: homeless men in Bailey and Davidson's research (2002 & 2005), incarcerated men in Cohen's study (2005), and incarcerated women in Silber's 2005 research. Bailey and Davidson (2005) compared marginalized and middle-class singers and found that for the middle-class singers the communal aspects of group singing was only slightly important, but it was very important for the marginalized group. It is probable that the "social needs of the more advantaged individuals are provided through encounters with partners, children, friends, and co-workers" (p. 296). With Silber's and Cohen's research, the social bonds that the prisoners made with one another aided greatly in helping them through a difficult time in their life. The personal closeness and group cohesiveness created a small community for them. The present study only included participants from middle and upper socioeconomic classes, so perhaps their social needs were being met elsewhere. It is likely that social benefits would have ranked higher if marginalized choirs were surveyed. *Spiritual:* Spiritual benefits were ranked last on the list. This is not surprising since this item also ranked at the bottom of the list in Clift and Hancox's (2001) and Hylton's (1981) research. Many people are not religious and if they are, religion is a very personal matter. Spirituality is hard to define and questionnaire statements about religious beliefs are difficult to clarify. With the diversity of people surveyed and the delicacy of this area, it is understandable that it was ranked as the lowest importance.

It is remarkable that there was no significant difference between church and community choirs on the aspect of spirituality. Many community choristers ranked it high and many church choristers ranked it low. There were differences found in Clift and Hancox's (2001) research on this factor. Religious and non-religious choristers were compared and it was found that religious members were more likely than non-religious members to report spiritual benefits. It is most likely that none were found in the present research because of the low number of church choirs surveyed (two) and because one of these church choirs had many paid singers, most of whom were not members of the church.

# <u>Research Question Two:</u> Using the results of the statements from the three main areas surveyed (emotional, intellectual, and social), are there significant differences in results between sample populations?

Considering the areas surveyed and the demographic information provided by choristers, some general comments can be made about certain sample populations: paid vs. volunteer choristers, chorister's area of residence, music degree vs. non-music degree choristers, age of choristers, type of choir, and choir size.

#### Paid vs. Volunteer Choristers

Volunteer singers felt that choral singing was a "satisfying experience" (p < .001), which provided them with a "sense of accomplishment" (p < .001) more so than paid singers. People who are paid to sing in a choir are doing it as employment, usually as a supplementary job. Few people strive to be a professional choral singer, but rather do it to make money so they can pursue professional solo careers. This is not to say that paid singers do not enjoy the choral singing experience, but choral singing for them, in most cases, would not be the pinnacle of their singing career. Therefore, the experience would not be as rewarding for them, as it is for volunteer singers.

The level of stress also differs between paid and volunteer singers. Volunteer singers felt some stress in learning the music and keeping up with their section, but overall they felt that singing in choir "raised their mood" (p < .001) and "helped them to relax" (p < .001) to a greater extent than paid singers. Volunteer singers choose to sing with a choir and it is, in most cases, something different than their daily work and routine. It is not something they are often trained to do, but rather they do it for the love of music and to enhance their life.

Paid singers, on the other hand, did not feel the same sense of relaxation and increase in positive mood. Job performance is of the utmost importance for paid singers. They are paid to lead their section, know their music, sight-read quickly, and blend in. Sometimes they are expected to run sectionals and learn the solo parts. Some singers may find this easy, but for others it is more challenging. There may also be competition within the paid core and sometimes between the paid singers and the volunteer singers; both situations would be stressful. One paid singer sums it up by saying: Singing with this group is fun and challenging, but it can be intense. Our choir sings difficult music and there are volunteer singers who strongly rely on us (the paid singers) for support and they get upset if we make a mistake, granted this is not all of the volunteers, but it can be stressful. There can be competition between the paid singers too, sometimes people get upset if they the director picks on them or their section, or if they don't get the solo they were expecting.

The physical benefits of choral singing were much more evident for volunteer singers than for paid singers (p < .001). This makes sense because the development of breath control, vocal range and flexibility, and posture are all new things for non-professionals. In addition, the strengthening of diaphragm, back, and arm muscles, is not something that many volunteer singers are accustomed to, whereas paid singers use these muscles everyday.

There was only one statement where a significant difference was found favouring paid singers: "Singing in choir gives me the opportunity to make new friends" (p < .05). Considering that choir is a job for the paid singers and a job is where one meets people and develops a support system, then this result makes sense. Paid singers connect with other singers and for them choir is a steady employment which gives them a chance to see the same people each week and to develop friendships.

#### Area of Residence

When comparing and discussing choristers' area of residence for this study, it should be noted that choristers from rural areas traveled to suburban or urban centers for choral participation, as all of the choirs surveyed were located in urban and suburban areas. Residents from rural areas generally made the biggest time and travel commitment to attend choir. It can be assumed that they would only make such commitments for something that makes them feel happy and that they consider a worthwhile activity. One rural singer says, "Singing in choir does me an enormous amount of good and I am so happy to sing with this choir that I travel more than 25 km to get here."

Rural choristers rated 13 of the 18 statements higher than both of the other groups. Most significantly, choristers from rural areas felt more like "valued members" of their choir than did choristers from urban (p < .02) and suburban (p < .02) areas. In rural areas the leisure and performance opportunities are fewer than in other areas and rural residents do not live as closely to their neighbours as suburban and urban residents do. The amount of effort required to socialize and gather for activities is thus often greater.

The results indicated that urban residents felt that singing in choir gave them a chance to "make new friends" (p < .02) and that the "social aspects of belonging to a group" were important to them (p < .05) more than suburban residents. In the fast-paced world of urban dwellers, it can be difficult to make social connections and to feel a sense of belonging. They are surrounded by other people all the time, but it is very easy to blend in and not be seen. One could easily pass a day without speaking to anyone since

many people keep to themselves. Being part of a choral group offers urban residents the occasion to meet other people and to make new friends.

#### Music Degree vs. Non-Music Degree Choristers

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The results of this study show that non-music degree choristers felt, to a greater extent than choristers with music degrees, that singing in choir was a "satisfying experience" (p<.01) which gave them a "sense of accomplishment" (p<.01). One of the requirements in most music degrees is participation in ensembles and by graduation many music students have sung in a choir. It can be assumed that people with a music degree have participated in important and large performances in their life (most likely even solo ones) and that singing with a choir would not be the pinnacle of their performance career. If a person with a music degree chooses to volunteer in a community or church choir, or to participate as a paid singer, chances are they have had similar earlier experiences. It is likely that the musical experiences they had in university were of a higher level than their present experience in a community or church choir.

For non-music degree singers, choir is likely to be a unique experience, perhaps even something they have not done before. Choristers who have not gone through the requirements of a music degree most likely feel that singing in their community or church choir is a fantastic and rewarding experience. Therefore, it is understandable that nonmusic degree singers find singing with a choir an activity which provides them with a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction.

#### Age of Choristers

Older choristers were more likely than younger choristers to experience the positive benefits of singing with a choir. There were no significant differences between middle-aged and senior choristers, but both older groups showed significant differences when compared with younger singers. The quality of the singing voice deteriorates considerably as a person gets older and the effort required to attend practices and performances is quite trying, so if older choristers have chosen to sing in a choir, it is obviously something of great value to them. Some retired singers remarked: "Now that I am retired, choir gives me the opportunity to be more socially active, work on memorization of songs, and to take a break and unwind," "Have not taken this (choral singing) up again....until retirement," and "Our 1 ½ hours of singing rehearsal, leaves me feeling younger and more energetic."

When considering the emotional side of singing, this study showed that older singers found choir to "raise their mood" (p < .01) and that it helped them "to relax" (p < .03) to a greater extent than younger singers. Older singers have most likely tried numerous leisure activities in their lifetime and have chosen ones that bring them happiness and relaxation.

Older choristers also focused on the intellectual aspects of group singing to a higher degree than younger singers. They felt that choir was a "satisfying experience" (p < .01), that offered them a "sense of accomplishment" (p < .01). Older singers felt that the cognitive side of choral singing kept their brains stimulated.

Younger choristers felt that the choral experience offered them the chance to "make new friends" more so than did the middle-aged (p < .04) and senior (p < .05)

choristers. Young adults are typically very social and have the time and interest to socialize outside of rehearsal time. This benefit was mirrored in research by Clift and Hancox (2001), who found that younger members of the choir were more likely than older members to report social benefits.

Lastly, middle-aged choristers (p < .001) and seniors (p < .001) found the physical benefits of choral singing more important than did younger singers. As one gets older, muscles weaken and it is very important to take care of one's body. The focus on proper breathing and posture, as well as muscle development, apparently meant a great deal to older singers.

#### **Type of Choir**

Choristers in church choirs have a weekly public performance, the Sunday service. There is pressure to prepare songs of a high calibre each week for the church service. This may make the choral experience a little less relaxing than singing with a community group, who usually only prepare for two or three performances a year. One singer said "I don't like church choirs where we rehearse for the upcoming Sunday only and then the songs change the next week. It is very important for me to be in a choir which practices for months for one or a few concerts." One of the significant differences found between these groups was on the statement "Singing in choir helps me to relax." Community singers found the experience more relaxing than church singers (p < .001).

Another interesting point was that church choristers found singing in choir provided the "opportunity to make new friends" more so than community choristers (p < .001). Some church choristers may be involved with choir because of a sense of religious

obligation. Others may be involved with the church in other ways, outside of their choir participation. Church choristers are already members of the congregation and the choir is a special group within that. Therefore, it is hard to discern whether is it indeed singing in the choir that allows the opportunity for friendship or if it is because of other involvement within the church. It could be that like-minded individuals in a church setting use choir as a meeting place and as another organized church activity in which to be involved. One church choir singer felt that "being part of my church choir makes me feel that I am contributing to my church."

#### Choir Size

It was found that the social benefits of belonging to a choir were of much greater importance to choristers in small choirs compared to choristers in medium and large choirs. In total, there were five statements pertaining to the social benefits of choral participation and all of them showed a significant difference favouring small choirs over large choirs. Differences were also found between small and medium choirs, and medium and large choirs. Essentially, the smaller the choir the more that social benefits were felt. One chorister put it well: "Singing in choir should provide an opportunity for new friendships, but I don't find this happens in this choir the same way it does in the other choir I sing in. Size may be a factor, as this choir is large (50-90 people) compared to the other one (14 people)."

Generally, choristers from small choirs felt "rewarded socially" (p < .05) compared with large choirs. Choristers from small (p < .03) and medium (p < .02) choirs felt that "the social aspects of belonging to a choir" were important compared with

choristers from large choirs. More specifically, when small choirs were compared with both medium and large choirs, choristers from small choirs felt a "positive connection" (p < .01) with each other and "made new friends" (p < .04) to a higher degree than other choristers. The "sense of unity" was much greater the smaller the choir (p < .001comparing small to medium, small to large, and medium to large).

All of these results show very plainly that the smaller the choir, the more social benefits are evident. The larger a group becomes, the easier it is to blend in and become isolated. It is difficult for large choirs to function as one cohesive social unit, so subgroups are usually created within them. When there are fewer people it is easier to get to know each member of the choir. The choir is more intimate and people feel a greater sense of connectedness to one another. It is foreseeable though, that this closeness could work to the disadvantage of the group if there are people who do not get along and feelings of ill-ease are evident each week.

There is more musical responsibility for each singer in a smaller group. A small choir gives each person more opportunities to define and obtain their role and identity within the group because when there are less people singing each part, each individual's voice matters a great deal. In this study, it was found that the smaller the choir, the more "valued" the members felt compared with medium (p < .05) and large (p < .02) choirs. A choir is a team, and it is only as strong as its weakest link. The smaller the choir, the more independent each member has to be. They are more likely to work harder and take ownership of their own part when singing in a smaller group. This agrees with the social psychology typologies of group performance and productivity, where, generally speaking, individuals tend to doubt their influence on the product's outcome as the size of the group increases (Wilke & Wit, as cited in Faulkner & Davidson, 2006).

#### Limitations of this Research

One potential problem with this questionnaire was the emphasis on positive statements and effects connected with singing. There were no negative statements on this questionnaire to offset the positive ones. This may have persuaded choristers to respond in a positive direction and thus created a bias in the responses. Many choristers place a high value on choral singing and show a definite interest in music, and therefore they would want to respond in a positive way to the statements given. There were many choristers who responded "agree" and "strongly agree" to many statements. However, in countering this argument it should be mentioned that most of the statements on the questionnaire offered a wide range of responses from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". When one considers the results, it does not appear likely that participants reacted and responded to the statements in a thoughtless approach led only by a general positive outlook toward music and choral singing.

A focus group discussion could have been an advantageous supplement to this research. Many respondents made additional comments on their questionnaires, but a deeper understanding could have been achieved by a thorough discussion with a diverse group of choristers. Reasons why choristers are happy (or relaxed, or challenged...) when they are at choir could have been pursued further and a focus group may have helped in responding to some queries.

#### Further Research

The potential for expanding this study is considerable. It would be informative to replicate this survey with a slightly longer and more detailed questionnaire. A questionnaire that would include detailed statements for not only the social, intellectual, and emotional benefits of choral singing, but also for the physical and mental health benefits, as well as spiritual and musical benefits. A more detailed survey could delve more profoundly into each of the various areas of choral benefits, thus allowing a deeper and more insightful view on the topic.

The choirs included in this survey were 12 community choirs and two church choirs. Many of the choirs included both genders, but three of the fourteen choirs surveyed were all female. It would be valuable to include diverse types of choirs, including university and college choirs, and professional choirs, along with some all male choruses. This would allow the opportunity to make comparisons between more sample populations. Also, by increasing the number and type of participants, interactions could be studied more effectively than in the present study. One might compare paid female and male choristers, choristers with a music degree singing in a professional choir compared with a community or church choir, or small church choirs compared with large church choirs.

Two areas of choral singing which appear to be of exceptional and distinctive interest are the intellectual and the mental health benefits. Firstly, since no research has been done solely in the area of intellectual benefits of choral singing, it would be appealing to undertake this topic. It would be fascinating to compare groups of people

before and after a variety of group activities, of which choir would be one. Comparing males and females, and people of different ages would be of special interest to see how various activities stimulate their brain. As well, it would be interesting to delve into a longitudinal study comparing choristers with non-choristers to see if over time their mental capacity increases on any area, be it memory, pattern solving, formal analysis, language development, and/or spatial intelligence.

Secondly, it is notable that many choristers mentioned that choir provided benefits to their mental health. In the present study this information was not requested of the participants, but given by them as written comments. Perhaps choral singing aids in dealing with depression or other mental illnesses. More detailed research in this area could be enlightening and may offer a potential treatment for some mental illnesses. This could be helpful to patients suffering with a mental illness and to health professionals in this field.

#### Conclusion

In sum, the present study shows that what motivates people to sing in choirs varies from person to person. Choral singing is a multifaceted phenomenon. Some trends were found and the present study did replicate earlier research, mainly demonstrating an association between choral singing and intellectual stimulation. The positive responses offered by the choristers clearly demonstrated that choral singing is an enjoyable and beneficial activity. It is hoped that this study makes a contribution to field of choral research and that it serves to inspire and induce further explorations into the perceived benefits of choral singing.

### Appendix A

### E-mail Message for the Recruitment of Subjects

#### Dear xxxxx,

My name is Jaymin Baird and I am a student at McGill. I am presently working on my thesis for my Masters in Music Education. I got your name from xxxxx (or I read about your choir in xxxxx) and was wondering if your choir might be interested in participating in a study for my thesis.

I have created a questionnaire which addresses the issues of the perceived benefits of singing in a choir. The perceived benefits of being a part of a musical group are numerous- musical, social, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and cognitive. I am interested in exploring the non-musical benefits of choral singing. The questionnaire consists of 18 statements with regards to the social, intellectual, and emotional aspects of singing in a choir. The participants are to rate each of the 18 statements on scale of 1-5. The questionnaire is very straight-forward and I don't expect it to take more than five minutes to complete. I am available to come to one of your choir rehearsals and administer the questionnaire myself, or if you prefer, you can administer it to your choir. It would really mean a lot to mean to have your choir participate.

Ideally, I would like to have the questionnaires administered in January or February 2007. They are completely voluntary and if a choir member chooses not to answer, that is absolutely fine. All of the results will remain completely confidential and your choir and choristers will not be named in my thesis. I hope to get around 400 choristers to participate and the results should be very interesting. The results from my research could be used by choral conductors, like yourself, to help enhance the choral experience for their singers or perhaps by music teachers who may be interested in the non-musical benefits of belonging to a choir.

I look forward to hearing from you, please let me know if you have any questions, comments or concerns. Thank you for so much for your time, I really appreciate it.

Sincerely, Jaymin Baird jayminbaird@s

### Appendix B

### **Choir Questionnaire**

Sex: Male Female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

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What type of area do you live in (please c	ircle one)? rural	suburban	urban
How many years have you been singing in	n choirs?		
How many years have you been singing in	n this particular choir?	)	
Are you paid to sing in this choir? Yes	No		
Do you have a music degree? Yes No	If so, what type?		

## PLEASE CIRCLE THE NUMBER THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PERSONAL OPINION TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS. THANK YOU.

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

1. Singing in choir raises my mood.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I find singing with a choir to be an emotionally moving activity.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Singing in choir helps me to relax.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Singing is choir is fun.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel rewarded socially by participating in choir.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel a positive connection to other choristers through my involvement with choir.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Singing in choir provides the opportunity to make new friends.	1	2	3	4	5
8. There is a sense of unity within our choir.	1	2	3	4	5

9. I feel stimulated intellectually by choral singing.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I find singing in choir to be a satisfying experience.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Singing in choir gives me a sense of accomplishment.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I feel like a valued member of my choir.	1	2	3	4	5
13. The <b>social</b> aspects of belonging to a choir are important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
14. The <b>emotional</b> aspects of belonging to a choir are important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
15. The <b>spiritual</b> aspects of choral singing are important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
16. The <b>musical</b> aspects of choral singing are important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
17. The <b>cognitive/intellectual</b> aspects of choral singing are important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
18. The <b>physical</b> benefits of choral singing are important to me.	1	2	3	4	5

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If you would like to further explain any of your answers feel free to do so in the space provided. Any additional comments would be greatly appreciated.



### **Appendix B- French version**

### Questionnaire pour chorale

Sexe : Masculin Féminin

Âge :\_\_\_\_

Dans quel type de région habitez-vous (encerclez une réponse)? rurale banlieue urbaine

Depuis combien d'année chantez-vous dans une chorale?

Depuis combien d'année chantez-vous dans cette chorale en particulier?

Êtes-vous rémunéré pour chanter dans cette chorale? Oui Non

Avez-vous un diplôme en musique? Oui Non Si oui, lequel?

### VEUILLER ENCERCLER LE CHIFFRE QUI DÉCRIT LE MIEUX VOTRE OPINION PERSONNELLE À PROPOS DES ÉNONCÉS SUIVANTS. MERCI.

1=Complètement en désaccord 2=En désaccord 3=Neutre 4=D'accord 5= Tout à fait d'accord

1. Chanter dans une chorale améliore mon humeur.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Chanter dans une chorale est une activité touchante émotionnellement.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Chanter dans une chorale m'aide à relaxer.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Chanter dans une chorale est amusant.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Je me sens récompensé socialement en chantant dans une chorale.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Je sens un rapport positif avec les autres membres grâce à mon implication dans ma chorale.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Chanter dans une chorale offre l'opportunité de se faire de nouveaux amis.	1	2	3	4	5

8. Il y a un sentiment d'unité dans une chorale.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Je me sens stimulé intellectuellement en chantant dans une chorale.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Chanter dans une chorale est une expérience satisfaisante.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Chanter dans une chorale me procure un sentiment d'accomplissement.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Je me sens comme un membre valorisé dans ma chorale.	1	2	3	4	5
13. L'aspect <b>social</b> d'appartenance à une chorale est important pour moi.	1	2	3	4	5
14. L'aspect <b>émotionnel</b> d'appartenance à une chorale est important pour moi.	1	2	3	4	5
15. L'aspect <b>spirituel</b> d'appartenance à une chorale est important pour moi.	1	2	3	4	5
16. L'aspect <b>musical</b> d'appartenance à une chorale est important pour moi.	1	2	3	4	5
17. L'aspect <b>cognitif/intellectuel</b> d'appartenance à une chorale est important pour moi.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Les bénéfices <b>physiques</b> du chant dans une chorale sont importants pour moi.	1	2	3	4	5

Soyez libre d'expliquer davantage certaines de vos réponses, si vous en ressentez le besoin. Tout commentaire additionnel sera grandement apprécié.

### Appendix C

### **Conductor Information Sheet**

Choir Information				
Name of Choir:				
Name of the Conductor:				
Type of Chorus- Please circle one word from each category that best describes your choir.				
Category 1 community church/religious university/school other, please specify:				
Category 2 volunteer semi-professional professional other, please specify:				
Approximate number of members in this particular choir:				
How many years has your choir been in existence?				
How many years have you been conducting this choir?				
How often does your choir rehearse/meet on a weekly basis?				
How long are your rehearsals?				
Research Questionnaire Information				
Was the 'Research Consent Form' for the research questionnaire read aloud to the members of your chorus? Yes No				
How many choristers were present when you gave the questionnaire?				
How many choristers chose to respond to the questionnaire?				

### Thank you very much for your time and assistance

### **Appendix D**

#### **Research Consent Form**

The principal investigator for this research project is M. Jaymin Baird. Jaymin is a Music Education Masters student at McGill University in Montreal and this is her thesis project. She is conducting research on the perceived benefits of singing in choir and our choir has been chosen to participate in her research. We have been asked to complete a questionnaire.

The questionnaire should take no more than 5 minutes to complete and consists of 18 statements that you are requested to rate on a scale of 1-5. The statements have to do with the social, intellectual, and emotional aspects of singing in a choir. There is also a short section that requires you to fill out demographic information about yourself. You do not have to identify yourself by name. The demographic information asked for on the questionnaire is general (age, sex, area you live in, number of years singing in a choir...), and even the researcher will not be able to identify the participants; confidentiality will be maintained.

This questionnaire is completely voluntary and there will be no consequences if you choose not to fill it out. You are under absolutely no obligation to take part and you may withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any of the questions. You will not be penalized by our conductor or the researcher for not participating.

If you are interested in participating, please complete this questionnaire now. There is only one questionnaire to answer and other than that, there are no other commitments or follow-up questions involved with this research. If you choose to complete it, your privacy and confidentiality is guaranteed. The information gathered today will be stored in Ms. Baird's computer and will be used only by her.

If you choose to fill out the questionnaire, then you are agreeing to let your information and responses to the questions be used by the researcher for her thesis. Your responses will be completely anonymous and all information gathered will remain confidential. Thank you.

The above information was read to the choir and the willing participants will fill out the questionnaire.

Signature:	Date:	

Researcher's Signature:

### Appendix E

### Steps for Administering the Questionnaire

1. Briefly describe the project in your own words. For example "We have been asked by a Music Education Masters student from McGill, Jaymin Baird, to participate in her thesis project. She would like us to fill out a questionnaire on the benefits of singing in a choir."

2. Read the Research Consent form aloud to all of the choristers. Answer any questions the choristers may have. Here are a few clarifying points for some of the questions you are likely to get:

- If a chorister is not comfortable with putting their age, ask them to put an approximation (ex- 40s, senior), the age is only so I can categorize them.

- Approximate years for "How many years have you been singing in choirs?" and "How many years have you been singing in this particular choir?" are fine.

- Questions 13-18 can be a little troublesome for some people. I basically want to determine what they find to be important with regards to being in a choir. If one of the categories is not clear, here are some further explanations.

13. The **social** aspects of belonging to a choir are important to me = making friends, spending time with others...

14. The **emotional** aspects of belonging to a choir are important to me = relaxing, positive energy and mood....

15. The **spiritual** aspects of choral singing are important to me = being at peace, being close to God- whatever/whomever that is to you...

16. The **musical** aspects of choral singing are important to me = learning to read music, understanding rhythm and musical concepts...

17. The **cognitive/intellectual** aspects of choral singing are important to me = keeps your brain sharp, challenges you....

18. The **physical** benefits of choral singing are important to me = improved breathing, posture, vocal flexibility...

3. Pass out the questionnaires and pencils to each willing participant. Please remind the choristers that the questionnaire is double-sided and ask them to be sure that they have filled out all the demographic information.

4. Please ask the director of the choir to fill out the Conductor Information Sheet.

5. Please give them a big "thank you" on my behalf and let them know that I understand how valuable their time is and that I really appreciate them filling out the questionnaire.

Thank you so much for administering the questionnaire on my behalf.

Jaymin Baird

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