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CBA Chorus strikes a chord with its NYC counterparts

Singers from Big Apple bar group headed to Windy City to perform with local legal voices

BY JAMIE LOO

Law Bulletin staff writer

The jumble of voices on The Chicago Bar Association's second-floor headquarters on a Wednesday night takes on a lighter atmosphere than most other evenings.

As the attorneys float through Philip H. Corboy Hall laughing and chatting with each other, they begin to take their seats and open up binders in preparation for the night's formal program.

Rather than getting ready to listen to a speaker at a Continuing Legal Education seminar, the lawyers are there to listen to each other so that they can sing with one voice.

It's rehearsal night for The Chicago Bar Association Chorus, and they're preparing for a joint concert with the New York City Bar Chorus to be called "A Toast to Two Cities" on Nov. 7 at 7:30 p.m. at St. James Episcopal Cathedral, 65 E. Huron. St.

While there are choral groups comprised of legal professionals in other countries, the CBA Chorus and City Bar Chorus (or CBC) appear to be unique in the U.S. and have formed a special bond.

"This is the second part of a two-city choral exchange, and both of our groups are very excited about it," said CBA Chorus Co-Director and Assistant Attorney General

Rebecca A. Burlingham.

The CBA Chorus traveled to New York to perform with the CBC at the New York City Bar Association building in March 2014. About 50 members of the CBC will be coming to Chicago for next week's concert.

It all started with a chance social media connection between CBA Chorus Director Rebecca Patterson and CBC Musical Director and conductor Kathryn E. Schneider.

Schneider, deputy general counsel of New York-based Medidata Solutions Inc., said Patterson was suggested to her as a connection on LinkedIn.

When she was in Chicago for an American Choral Directors Association conference in 2011, they met up for sandwiches and soon were discussing a joint concert someday.

Both choral groups will perform their own sets plus four songs together at the concert. The 80-member CBA Chorus

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tends to have a more classical repertoire, Patterson said, and sings American folk songs, hymns and spirituals — including pieces from such composers as Aaron Copland and Moses Hogan.

The CBC has a wide range of styles which includes spirituals



Chorus director Rebecca Patterson (left) thanks the crowd after a Dec. 13, 2013, holiday concert performed by The CBA Symphony Orchestra and the CBA Chorus. Patterson's chorus will team up with a similar all-legal chorus from New York City at a concert in Chicago on Nov. 7. *Brian J. Morowczynski*

ON THE DOCKET

The Chicago Bar Association Chorus and the New York City Bar Chorus concert, "A Toast to Two Cities: A Musical Showcase," will be on Nov. 7 at 7:30 p.m. at St. James Episcopal Cathedral, 65 E. Huron St., Chicago. Tickets are \$12 in advance (\$10 for students), \$15 at the door. To purchase tickets online go to CBACHorusTOASTtoTWO.brownpapertickets.com. To learn more about the bar choruses, go to chicagobar.org/chorus and citybarchorus.org.

and gospel as well as Broadway musicals and well-known songs by George Gershwin, Billy Joel, the Jackson 5, the Beatles, Queen and the Pretenders.

"We're going to have 120 singers (combined), maybe more," Patterson said. "And in the beautiful space of St. James Cathedral, 120 voices is going to sound out of this world. I'm looking forward to hearing some lush choral sound."

The CBA Chorus was formed nine years ago as an ad hoc group to perform with the CBA Orchestra for its performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony to celebrate the orchestra's 20th anniversary.

Patterson, a non-lawyer who is a professional musician, voice teacher and choral conductor, said the chorus decided to stay together and keep performing.

The group comprises lawyers, judges, law students and other legal professionals, but it's open

to anyone regardless of musical experience. Many CBA Chorus members sang in high school or in church choirs.

Burlingham said the chorus has performed with local choral groups such as the Elgin Master Chorale, the Naperville Chorus and the Young Naperville Singers. In 2013, they took a trip to Springfield to perform Civil War-era songs at the Old State Capitol.

CBA Chorus Co-Chair Dorothy A. Voigt, who sings alto and by day is an associate at Schiller, DuCanto & Fleck LLP, said the group does some beautiful music and that it's fun to share this experience with fellow attorneys.

"For me, the music is a great way to relax and challenge my brain in a different way, and I just enjoy spending a couple of hours every week with the people," she said.

The chorus also provides a different avenue for community outreach for the bar association,

Burlingham said. For instance, CBA Chorus members are planning holiday caroling visits this winter to nursing homes, hospitals and other locations.

Burlingham, who sings soprano, said she loves the camaraderie between the chorus members both professionally and musically.

“There’s something about singing in harmony with a group of people. It’s electrifying,” she said. “I’ve never known such fascinating people, they’re all very friendly and very personable. It’s just a great experience all around.”

Terrence Kennedy Jr., the chorus’ co-chair and partner at the Law Offices of Terrence Kennedy Jr., sings with other

amateur groups. He credits Patterson as a strong director and said the chorus’ music is challenging so he always feels he is learning and making progress in a relaxed, fun environment.

“I invite a lot of my clients to our concerts,” he said. “I think it just shows a human side of the attorneys, and we really enjoy doing that.”

Showing the kinder side of attorneys is part of the mission of the CBC, Schneider said, which was formed in 1993 to reach out to the community with “musical pro bono” and also serves as a goodwill ambassador for the New York City Bar Association. The group regularly performs concerts in places such as senior residences, homeless

shelters, pediatric and rehabilitation facilities.

The CBC has never traveled for a concert, Schneider said, so Chicago will be their “first real road trip.” Chorus members have talked about how they’ve stayed in touch with many Chicago attorneys from the last joint concert and are looking forward to coming to the Windy City.

“We’re very happy to get so many people signed up,” she said. “Being an all-legal professional group, it’s hard to get time away from the office.”

The CBC has performed with other choral groups including international bar choruses such as the Vizcaya Bar Chorus from Bilbao, Spain, and the Faculty of

Advocates Choir of Edinburgh, Scotland.

Schneider said she thinks shows such as “Glee,” the movie “Pitch Perfect” and other music pop culture events have played a role in a resurgence of interest in choral singing over the past eight years. People who may have participated in choruses in their younger days want to return to it, she said, and there appear to be more bar choruses popping up.

She said there are enough bar choruses in Spain that they have their own legal choral festival.

“It’s great to see the wide spectrum of singing legal professionals finding ways to express their artistic talent and interests.”