

Greater Milford Community Chorus Celebrates 50 Years of Harmony



A Sentimental Journey

50 years of favorites



Sunday, May 7, 2023 | 1:30 p.m.

Time flies when you're having fun! It's been 50 years since the Greater Milford Community Chorus came to life back in 1973. As the story goes, Don Thatcher, long-time music teacher in Milford, was working with the Milford High School Chorus who wanted to perform portions of the Messiah as part of their annual holiday concert. They felt they needed some bench strength, and at the suggestion of a student chorus member, they invited members of the community to join them. Dr. James Buckley, who was assistant superintendent at the time, encouraged Thatcher to make it happen, and with that, a contingent of community singers – including Jim Buckley and his wife Sandy – became original members of the group, and the Milford Community Chorus was born under the jurisdiction of the Milford Community School Use Program and rehearsals and performances took place at Milford High School.

Since 1973 the chorus grew in size to a membership of ~70 singers from Milford and surrounding towns, and also went through a couple of dormant stages and reorganizations. For a time the chorus home was at the Unitarian Universalist Church under the direction of Pastor Richard Helfand. After a few years, the chorus once again became part of the Milford Community Use Program headed up by Lenny Morcone, resuming rehearsals at Milford High, and performing at Memorial Hall on School Street. Membership continued to grow and attract members from surrounding communities. To accurately represent the span of its membership, the chorus name was changed to **The Greater Milford Community Chorus**.

During this span of 50 years GMCC has been under the leadership of four directors: Don Thatcher, Richard Helfand, Dan Zabinski and Mark Schiappucci.

Don Thatcher, who passed away in 2017, was director for 37 years, handing over his baton in 2010. Thatcher is fondly remembered by many who are still in the chorus as a man with infinite patience, a lover of music and a gifted teacher.

In the fall of 2010, recently retired Daniel Zabinski, a resident of Uxbridge, and music teacher in Cumberland, RI for 35 years, had recently become music director for St. Mary's Church in Uxbridge and had also been hired to be the piano accompanist for the chorus under Thatcher's directorship. When he learned that Thatcher was retiring after the 2010 holiday concerts, he decided to apply. At that time, Chorus President Linnea Silvia and the search committee felt comfortable with Zabinski since he had been accompanying the chorus on piano at rehearsals, and they had already developed a familiarity and good rapport. Zabinski was hired, and took the lead through May of 2019, when he retired to spend more time with his family. Dan Zabinski is fondly remembered as an animated and passionate director.

In 2019 a search began for GMCC's next director, and in September 2019, GMCC was fortunate to have Mark Schiappucci take over as GMCC's third director. Schiappucci is a graduate of Milford High and he went on to the New England Conservatory where he studied classical vocal performance. His vast breadth of musical knowledge, keen sense of humor, decisiveness, clarity, and patience made him a shoe-in for the role. He is a professional singer in his own right, and his passion for singing and gift for teaching is taking GMCC to new levels.

Wayne Ward has been GMCC's piano accompanist since 2010. Wayne's infinite musical knowledge, collegiality and quick wit help to make weekly rehearsals successful and fun! Ward, a Holliston resident, is a graduate of Tufts University and The Eastman School of Music. Wayne's teaching career began at the Dansville junior high school in Dansville, New York, where he taught from 1973-1975. In the fall of 1975, Wayne became a member of the music education department faculty at Berklee College of Music in Boston; later he was promoted to the rank of full professor. 2020 marked his 45th year on the Berklee faculty, and this past year, Wayne retired from Berklee.

Wayne has extensive experience in musical theater, opera and accompanying. He was the resident music director at Turtle Lane Playhouse in Newton for 30 years. He has been both music director and assistant music director for the Longwood Opera Company in Needham for more than 20 years. Since the fall of 2007, Wayne has been the organist and choir director at Union Evangelical Church UCC in Hopedale.

Since 2015 GMCC has had the privilege to collaborate with Claflin Hill Symphony Orchestra for the orchestra's annual Holiday Pops in the historic Grand Ballroom at Milford Town Hall. Under the direction of CHSO Founder & Artistic Director Paul Surapine, CHSO has afforded GMCC members with the opportunity to sing with a professional orchestra on a yearly basis at Holiday Pops, which has provided an additional impetus to the chorus' steady growth and improvement in the last decade. CHSO and GMCC also have brought their stellar Holiday Pops collaboration on numerous occasions to performances at the Stadium Theater in Woonsocket, RI. These experiences have pushed members to achieve a new level of singing toward achieving a high standard of performance. Both the chorus and audience members look forward to this collaboration every December.

"We congratulate the Greater Milford Community Chorus on the achievement of reaching their 50th Year Anniversary," said Surapine. "It has been a privilege and a pleasure to work with everyone involved in GMCC, and to witness their steady growth and vocal improvement in the five or so years we have partnered with them. Above all, we enjoy sharing the joy of music-making and community with them. We look forward to years of continued partnership, concertizing and building culture together."

GMCC presents two holiday concerts each December consisting of one evening and one afternoon performance. The music selections incorporate familiar favorites with lesser-known gems, always creating crowd-pleasing programs. Each May GMCC presents a Sunday matinee concert consisting of popular tunes – both old and new. The GMCC actively participates in several community outreach events throughout the year, such as performing at the Town of Milford’s Annual Christmas Tree Lighting and holiday fairs. GMCC has presented mini concerts for assisted living facilities and has performed on numerous occasions with The New England Tenors in Hopedale.

Shortly after joining the chorus GMCC members find that Monday night rehearsals are a “night out with extended family.” The 40+ members are a welcoming group of singers that are very supportive of one another. Lifelong friendships have been forged based on the love of singing.

GMCC is run by a Board of Directors who come from varied backgrounds and experiences but share their passion for the choral arts. GMCC current board members are Susan McWade Surapine, President, Susan Besozzi, Vice President, Laurel Heske, Clerk/Historian, Nora McRae, Treasurer. The GMCC Board is both a working board and a governing board, and board members give generously of their time and talent. The board is excited to be celebrating this 50 year milestone and to continue their efforts of bringing GMCC to continued high levels of success in the future.

In honor of those who have kept GMCC going for the past 50 years, a celebratory concert will be given on May 7 entitled “Sentimental Journey: 50 Years of Favorites.” All former members are encouraged to join GMCC for this celebration.

A Sentimental Journey – 50 Years of Favorites
Sunday, May 7 at 1:30 PM
The Grand Ballroom at Milford Town Hall
52 Main Street
Milford, MA

Tickets are on sale prior to the concert for \$10 each at Music & Arts, 164 Main Street, Milford. Tickets will be on sale at the door for \$12 each. Group rates are available by contacting: info@greatermilfordcommunitychorus.org.



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