

People you know



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John Corrie, Bates College professor and artistic director at the Maine Music Society.

John Corrie, making music

BY KATHRYN SKELTON
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LEWISTON — John Corrie speaks with a genuine passion for singing and teaching, about getting to know his students and choirs and about the joys of collaboration.

And he speaks with an accent that's ... British? Something European?

"It's really quite fun because no one can place the voice," said Corrie, 68.

The longtime Bates College lecturer and artistic director for the Maine Music Society is a New York native. Not that you'd guess.

"What I have as an accent is a result of my language study and also complaining to voice students and choir members that they're not pronouncing their final consonants, so it's sort of taken over," he said.

Corrie started singing as a preschooler. "My family in Buffalo was sort of the local von Trapp family," he said. "There were six of us, we all sang. The local Baptist church could count on us for some entertainment. One crazy trip we made in the car in 1956, we drove to Florida without a radio in the car, so

we sang the whole way."

He met his future wife, Rebecca, while studying at Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Ohio, and came to Maine for the first time in 1969 on their honeymoon.

The couple moved to Lewiston in 1982 when Rebecca Corrie accepted a job teaching art and visual culture at Bates College. John started teaching sight singing and ear training there that same year.

Corrie, who plays harpsichord, organ and piano, was friends and worked with Frank Glazer, the noted pianist who died this year just before he was set to perform at his own 100th birthday concert.

Everyone, he said, starts to stiffen and get arthritis with age, but "I'm hoping that keyboard players push off the inevitable a little further. Frank Glazer was a great example — it was surprising how much it energized him. It's a very encouraging role model to have."

Corrie leads choirs at Bates, at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in Yarmouth and at the Maine Music Society. On Friday evening, he'll also perform with MMS's chamber singers at Art Walk

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Lewiston Auburn.

Singing should be social, Corrie said. Part of the fun is getting to know each other, sharing details of each other's lives and swapping musical recommendations.

"(Students) expand my horizons," he said. "I get introduced to all kinds of stuff by the students, like Adele. 'You have to listen to her, John.' It's a two-way street. I find it odd when I find some student who doesn't share much. You just want to go, 'Well, what are we doing here?'"

Among his projects are pulling together two concerts for next spring: one for Maine Music Society around the work of Billy Joel and Elton John, and one a major citywide collaboration involving singers and musicians at Bates,

Maine Music Society, the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul and Lewiston and Auburn high schools, to be performed at the Basilica.

The five choirs together will perform "Meeresstille und Glückliche Fahrt" by Beethoven.

"(For high school students), they can experience performing with an orchestra before they get to college," Corrie said. "The educational benefit for them is really quite wonderful."

Also quite wonderful-sounding: Corrie's end-of-semester tradition for students in his college choir. It's a cheesecake party, and part of his other passion: cooking.

"I've found a really good recipe for a vegan cheesecake," he said.

Know someone everyone knows? Contact staff writer Kathryn Skelton at 689-2844 or kskelton@sunjournal.com.