

Jazz choir finds its footing in Halton communities

Musical Director Darcea Hiltz says the group has proficient members who are passionate and dedicated like no other

by Julia Le
Oakville Beaver Staff

A passion for jazz has brought teachers, executives, doctors and retirees together in harmony — literally.

Under the direction of retired Halton District School Board music teacher Darcea Hiltz, Halton Jazz Choir has quickly found its footing after forming about a year ago in February.

Typically meeting once every two weeks at the First Church of Christ Scientist on Rebecca Street, Hiltz describes how each member comes prepared to sing in a four-part harmony after sight-reading and rehearsing their individual parts on their own.

“It satisfied my musical talents and skills and calls upon those musicians and singers who also have that better-than-average level of musicianship where their voices are concerned. It requires you to read, dig in, learn your part and so you’ve got to have the joy of wanting to sing the tight harmonies.”

Darcea Hiltz
Halton Jazz Choir Group musical director

“We learn pieces faster because of the proficiency of our singers,” she said, noting how all members have some form of musical background, whether it’s from formally being taught earlier in their lives or participating in other musical groups and choirs within Oakville.

But what sets them apart is the group is the first of its kind in Halton, said Hiltz, who started the group because she wanted to continue being involved in music after retiring from her 17-year career as a music teacher.

While there are jazz singers in Halton, there isn’t an adult community jazz group in the west end of the Greater Toronto Area, she noted.

Hiltz, the musical director, said she has had a deep admiration for jazz that traces back to her collection of *The Nylons* and other notable jazz bands.

Moving forward in forming the group has been a way to fulfill her love of the style.

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Jason Miller, who joined the group last year shortly after seeing a post for it on the Halton District School Board teachers’ forum, said learning the music is challenging, but in a positive way.

The 59-year-old Burlington resident, who is a Computer Science and Mathematics teacher at Georgetown District High School, said it’s different from your average vocal ensemble and provides him with a greater opportunity to explore music at “a different end of the spectrum.”

Miller used to take vocal lessons and sing as a teenager, but had stopped for three decades.

Now that he’s back at it, he said it’s been fun revisiting what he enjoyed in his earlier years and working with a talented group to create four-part harmonies.

“I always enjoyed choral singing, whether I’m part of it or listening to it,” he said, reflecting on his past. “I love to hear a good choir no matter what they’re singing and I appreciate hearing all the parts, top and bottom lines and inner voices.”

“It’s nice to have a group I can participate in and rehearse at a high level,” he added.

Currently there are six musicians in the group, with room to accommodate up to 12 singers, said Hiltz, noting they are hosting



The Halton Jazz Choir rehearses at the First Church of Christ Scientist chapel in Oakville. Back row, from left, are Jason Miller, George Smith and Stephen Williams. Front row, from left, Janice Ketchen, Daisy Tampinco, Darcea Hiltz (founder and music director) and Jennifer Walsh. | photo by James Hoggett – special to the Oakville Beaver

open rehearsals right now if singers, especially alto and tenors, want to give them a test run.

During Christmas, the group performed at an Oakville seniors’ residence and they actively participate in professional development when the opportunity becomes avail-

able. Earlier this month, the female singers of Halton Jazz Choir participated in clinics offered by New York Voices at Humber College as part of its Artist in Residence program.

For more information, visit www.haltonJAZZchoir.com.

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