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Volunteers

Community Chorus debuts in Music City

The Music City Community Chorus debut was Tuesday night at Christ Church Cathedral.

By James Nix
Staff Writer

When Renee Grant-Williams looked around Nashville, she noticed all kinds of opportunities for musical expression except one – a community chorus.

"It struck me as odd that Music City had no ... broad-based community chorus," she said.

The music director, vocal instructor and author decided Music City needed a volunteer community chorus that provides musically inclined citizens of all skill levels an outlet for their talents.

The chorus gained non-profit status back in May 2004, and in January 2006 a donor, who wished to remain anonymous,

See Chorus on Page 15

Chorus ...

From Page One

provided \$25,000 to get the program up and running.

But it was not until August of last year – with the support of Mayor Bill Purcell and the Metro Nashville Community Education Program – when the Music City Community Chorus officially kicked off, Grant-Williams said.

The chorus is open to volunteers of all ages, abilities and walks of life – "everybody who is of legal age ... just anybody who has free Monday nights," she said, referring to the practices held from 7 to 10 p.m. each Monday night.

The MCCC currently is made up of 65 members, although Grant-Williams hopes to build that number to 100 members soon. It consists of doctors, lawyers, ministers and even some of those left homeless by Hurricane Katrina.

The MCCC will often be accompanied by the Excelsior Chamber Orchestra – or the Excelsior String Quartet or the Excelsior Woodwind Quintet. The names are really just products of self-amusement for the conductor.

"When it's not an official group that I'm working with, they always turn into the Excelsior this or that," Grant-Williams said.

"It's a way of telling people there will be instruments there."

The chorus is largely volunteer based, but "I hope to one day create a salary for the director," Grant-Williams said. "I don't want this to begin and end with me. I'd like to create a continuing ongoing tradition."

Right now Grant-Williams is



The Music City Community Chorus practices for its debut concert at Christ Church Cathedral Tuesday night. At left are some of the instrumentalists assembled for the concert.

Photos by James Nix

still trying to learn the ins and outs of running a non-profit organization as well as generating interest in the form of contributions to allow the chorus to continue.

The chorus will operate in two sessions a year with one performance from each session. There will be one spring session from February through May and one fall session from September through December.

There are auditions, but they are not rigorous, Grant-Williams said, and will mainly serve to determine skill level and vocal range.

Auditions include scales and learning a piece of music the MCCC provides. Auditions will be held later in February for the

spring session.

"They have to put forth the effort to learn the music, then we want them," she said.

Grant-Williams also founded and conducted the San Francisco Community Chorus, and is author of the book "Voice Power: Using Your Voice to Captivate, Persuade and Command Attention."

Grant-Williams has served as the director of vocal music at the University of California, Berkeley, and as the music director at the Actor's Studio in New York.

She is also an established vocal coach, who has instructed many big-name groups and artists – Tim McGraw, Ben Folds, Brenda Lee, etc.

But for Grant-Williams, directing the chorus is not so much of a job as it is a pleasure.

"I did this partly for the city but partly for me too," she said, "because I'm a musician and one of the instruments I play is orchestra and chorus."

Unlike some groups she has led, which never find their own identity, the MCCC has developed an "incredible spirit that carries them beyond their skill level," Grant-Williams said.

"I had a moment of about 30 seconds (at a recent practice) that was about as transcendent as any moment I've had in music."