



The Benefits of Group Singing

- Group Singing...
- ✓ can boost your immunity.
 - ✓ is an excellent form of exercise.
 - ✓ lowers your blood pressure.
 - ✓ releases endorphins and oxytocin.
 - ✓ improves your posture.
 - ✓ improves your memory.
 - ✓ helps with sleep.
 - ✓ is a natural anti-depressant.
 - ✓ lowers stress levels.
 - ✓ improves mental alertness.
 - ✓ brings people together and creates a sense of community.
 - ✓ boosts your confidence
 - ✓ leads to a longer life.

That sense of shared purpose and camaraderie is a common thread among choral singers. "I love that we're working together toward something that is outside of ourselves, which we can bring to other people."



Poet Speaks

Resident Cathy Henley-Erickson, Poet Laureate of the City of La Verne, penned "Singing Together", a touching recollection of her earliest memory of singing together, a pleasure she has cherished throughout her life.

SINGING TOGETHER

The earliest music that I can remember: My grandmother's alto of Little Brown Brother she gave me the tune, we sang it in thirds.

Her whistling was air with a kind of a hum, her lips shaped like kissing, the faintest of sounds her own sort of sacred attention to housework,

I tilted my head to catch the sweet whisper her smallest ethereal healing and praise lifted me up to be more than a grandchild.

Now sisters and brothers around and behind me surround me with spirit, with sadness and joy singing encloses us, anthems envelop.

We honor the making of music together like love, a warm breath of something like prayer breaking cold silence with stillness and calm.

Cathy Henley-Erickson
October 14, 2017



Left to right: Anne and Tom Henley and Michael and Kathy Lamkin

New Residents With a Life-Long Passion for Music

These smiling couples represent the newest wave of musical residents at the Gardens. Anne and Tom Henley, who moved to the Gardens in February, both used their degrees in music education as elementary and junior high teachers. They have many years of involvement with chorales in Orange County and currently sing with the Pacific Chorale, a commitment that involves about 75 rehearsals and performances a year. Kathy and Michael Lamkin were college music professors. Kathy specialized in music history at University of La Verne and Michael's focus was on conducting in the Joint Music program at Scripps, Claremont McKenna, Harvey Mudd, and Pitzer Colleges. They have been associated with the Classical Summer Music Festival in Eisenstadt, Austria for many years. Kathy served as music librarian and member of the orchestra and Michael served as artistic director and principal conductor. All four of these accomplished musicians look forward to continuing to pursuing their passion for music as Mt. San Antonio Gardens residents.



Resident John Tate formed the first singing group at the Gardens, when he moved to the campus in 2007.

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How Can I Keep From Singing?

says those who've never tried it before, really enjoy it when they get involved. "It is great fun and a joyful experience. It is more than just something to do for me, and it becomes the same for them. They get wrapped up in the experience."

Regardless of the enormous physical, social and psychological benefits of group singing confirmed by the research, residents love group singing mainly for the sheer pleasure of making beautiful music. "Giving music to words and poetry is a great artistic experience," says John. "It's the creation of a kind of art that is just joyful for everyone doing it and hearing it." Adds Frankie, "There is enormous enrichment, not just from singing, but from learning about composers and styles and nationalities." There is also great pleasure in sharing the beauty of music with others. "As part of the group, I feel proud of our performances and feel good when they inspire people," says Marilyn. "I love to hear people say, "Wow, that was gorgeous."

"I feel so fortunate and privileged to be able to continue to sing in groups," says Cathy. "I don't know how much longer I can go on, but until I'm told I have to stop, I'm going to continue!"

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The New Leaf

April 2018



How Can I Keep From Singing?

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Julie Howard and Carolyn Prestwich (in front row) perform with more than 50 talented resident-members of the Gardens Chorale.

The New Leaf

Mt. San Antonio Gardens is a nationally accredited Life Care senior community in Claremont and Pomona, California.

The New Leaf is a newsletter for friends and family of residents, board and staff, as well as individuals who have inquired about life at the Gardens.

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For frequent updates, "Like" Mt. San Antonio Gardens on Facebook

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Please join us as we explore the paths available to us as we age.

Weds., June 20 and Thurs., Oct. 4, 2018

11:00 a.m. through the lunch hour at Mt. San Antonio Gardens. Seating is limited. Reservations are required.

Please call (909) 399-1279 to provide the names of attendees, phone number and mailing address.

A confirmation will be mailed.

You're invited to lunch and a look at... The Road Ahead

The research results on the health benefits of singing in groups is astonishing...

ask any of the Gardens' multitude of talented choral singers why they enjoy the experience of group singing and you will hear words like rejuvenation, passion, camaraderie, and inspiration. While those who sing have always known it was a pleasing and enriching experience, only recently have the health benefits of group singing – both physical and psychological – garnered much public attention. Now research studies are documenting what singers already knew, and a whole lot more. The findings, it seems, are even startling for those who know first hand the exhilaration of group singing, since they rarely pause to contemplate why the experience makes them feel so good.

"I've always known that choral music is good for the spirit and the soul," says **Gania Trotter**, whose musical pedigree includes singing with the Robert Shaw Collegiate Chorale, teaching, conducting, and assisting the Gardens Chorale. But what about the body? According to author Daniel H. Pink, who synthesized a plethora of research studies in his book, "WHEN: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing," "The research on the benefits of singing in groups is stunning. Choral singing calms heart rates and boosts endorphin levels. It improves lung function. It increases pain thresholds and reduces the need for pain medication ... Group singing – not just performances but also practices – increases the production of immunoglobulin, making it easier to fight infections." It's great for good posture and muscle tension, too.



The Gardens Barbershop Quartet performing at the "1940's Revue" show presented and performed by the residents. The quartet includes (left to right) Stuart Oskamp, Lee McDonald, Lynn Bush and Wes Hawks.

It's also good for the brain. "You have to keep the brain working," notes **Pat Kelly**, who is the current director of the Gardens Chorale, which numbers more than 50 residents. "It has been shown that if you do something challenging everyday, the brain gets exercised and you learn more things." Learning new songs is cognitively stimulating and helps the memory. Singing improves blood circulation, and an oxygenated blood stream allows more oxygen to reach the brain, thus improving mental alertness, concentration and memory.

"It's true that singing is athletic in terms of needing to use your whole body," says resident **John Tate**, who formed the first singing group at the Gardens, when he moved to the campus in 2007. "Singing in a group requires hard work, controlling and using your breath. Being stimulated in a positive way is always healthy." And

The Road Ahead

See invitation on back page.

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The December Gardens Chorale performance featured the angelic voice of Theo Burke of Carden Arbor View School.



Pat Kelly, the current director of the Gardens Chorale, leads the singers in "The Shepherds' Chorus."

strengthens the other," says Pat. "It's a different kind of thing, working as a unit," Gardens Chorale member Sherri Bode agrees. "Like anything that involves working together, no one person can stand out. So, there's an interesting psychology to it."

For Frankie Nobert, who sang with the L.A. Master Chorale for 14 years and taught music at Whittier College, there is nothing comparable to collaborative music making. "It's a phenomenal experience, like playing on a sports team, where the whole is greater than the parts," she says. "It takes the same cooperation, and you create something really beautiful together that no single person could do by themselves."

That sense of shared purpose and camaraderie is a common thread among choral singers. "I love that we're working together toward something that is outside of ourselves, which we can bring to other people," says Marilyn. "I love being in a group, being surrounded by sound, by people who feel the same way I do about music," seconds Cathy, who has been a member of the Claremont Chorale since the 1970s and sings with the Gardens Chorale. "Singing the music, playing the music, especially with a group, takes you out of yourself. The experience may change over time, but it is one of the things now that brings me back to my better self," says Carol

Tanenbaum, who plays the guitar and banjo and organized a twice-monthly folk music "jam" session at the Gardens. Observes Stuart Oskamp, who has been a member of the Claremont Chorale for 49 years and sings with the Gardens Chorale, "Everyone can sing in their shower. But the experience of singing as a group is something special."

Why is that group experience so satisfying? Author Jill Suttie, in a 2015 article on the benefits of music, notes that performing music involves coordinating efforts – especially to create a pleasing sound – and that people tend to have positive social feelings towards those with whom they synchronize. In addition to the release of endorphins, researchers have also pointed to increased levels of oxytocin in singers, a neuropeptide that plays an important role in the ability to forge and maintain relationships, to empathize and trust. Describing the effects of group singing, Don Stewart, head of public health at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia, said, "It's very much about the act of togetherness, the importance of being involved with others gives people this strong sense of connectedness and well-being."

Research also reveals that group singing not only helps forge social bonds, it also does so particularly quickly, acting as an excellent icebreaker, according to authors Jacques Launay and Eiluned Pearce in an article published by UC Berkeley. Further, community singing is effective for bonding large groups, making it an ideal activity to improve broader social networks. There's increasing evidence that suggests that these social connections can play a vital role in maintaining good health.

"Chorale connections have often provided an entree to a new community for me," says Marilyn. When she moved to the Gardens, she was new to Claremont and didn't have any association with the community. "I had to create those for myself. Joining the Claremont Chorale was a way for me to establish a reference group outside of the Gardens. Singing is a way into a new community." It's also a way to

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Gardens' resident Carol Tanenbaum and her banjo have a weekly engagement with 2nd graders at Chaparral Elementary School in Claremont. The program, "Folk Music for Fun," teaches the students a variety of classic folk songs.



establish new friendships and connections with people, based on a common love of singing. "There is a certain amount of camaraderie when you're sitting with the same group of people in a choir, and you develop a much different relationship, because you share this common interest in music, than you would otherwise," notes Ladell Payne, who sings in the Gardens Chorale.

Group singing has also been shown to serve as a bridge to self-esteem and acceptance, as was the case for several Gardens residents in their youth. The trauma of a move to a new country and a new high school was softened for Sherri by an inspiring music director. "He was actually the catalyst for me to go into music," she says. "Even though it was a hard year for me, it was also great because of music." Singing was a lifeline for Ladell as well after he was double promoted into a higher grade, where the older boys looked at him as fair game. He was plagued by a lack of self-esteem. "The fact that I was playing violin didn't cut any ice with them," he chuckles. But when he made it to high school and was accepted into the prestigious boys chorus, life changed. "It was extremely important to my sense of self-worth in high school, and my interest in music gave a sense of purpose to my being."

Residents who have taught voice and directed choral groups,



Lee Jackman leads twice weekly sing-a-long sessions with residents at Magnolia Grove, the Gardens' skilled nursing center.

especially with young people, have had a unique opportunity to observe these benefits. "The bonding and fellowship of doing something together is remarkable. Quiet, shy kids start to blossom, and the minute they walk on stage their whole sense of self is enriched," says Gania. John saw similar benefits when he was directing school and church choirs. "There was a real joy in singing together. I believe that's the same experience for other age groups as well."

Lee Jackman plays the piano and leads weekly sessions at the Gardens' skilled nursing facilities, Magnolia Grove and Taylor Villa. "I have seen God's hand in music, in these souls who are closed off most of the time to other people, or who don't have the facility of speech anymore, or who have dementia. Music speaks to them," she says. "They are absolutely awakened by the music and the words, and it brings tears to my eyes. I see the magic of music in one's life. The magic is always there, and I am fortunate to get to experience that with them."

Cathy has also witnessed the transformation when she visits Magnolia Grove. "I'm not sure if they're aware of being in a group, but they are aware of the good feelings coming out of their mouths while they sing. They might not be able to tell you what they had for

My life flows on in endless song;
Above life's lamentation,
I hear the sweet, tho' far-off hymn
That hails a new creation;
Thro' all the tumult and the strife
I hear the music ringing;
It finds an echo in my soul—
How can I keep from singing?

— Excerpt from hymn "How Can I Keep From Singing?"



Gardens' residents Pat Kelly, Lee Jackman, and Jane O'Donnell perform together during the Gardens' "1940's Revue."

"Giving music to words and poetry is a great artistic experience. It's the creation of a kind of art that is just joyful for everyone doing it and hearing it."

breakfast that morning, but they sure remember songs they sang as kids."

Pat plays piano and leads the singing at the Glendora After Stroke Center and has seen the benefits of group singing in the recovery process. "It's good for learning and recall," she says, noting that people who cannot speak because of a stroke are often able to sing an entire song, without missing a word.

Research suggests that singing provides relief also for people whose loved ones are experiencing these kinds of deteriorating health conditions or dementia, or whose spouses have passed away. Group singing can be a natural anti-depressant and can lower stress levels. The experience of singing, it is suggested, can help them weather challenges and navigate these life-altering experiences.

For those who have nurtured a love of singing but never thought themselves talented enough to participate in a choir or chorale, take heart. You, too, may have the opportunity to enjoy the physical and socially enriching benefits of group singing. "We have people who have never sung before who come to try out for the Gardens

Chorale," says Gania. One man confided to John Tate that when he was in college, his fraternity brothers ordered him never to sing a note at the annual inter-fraternity sing ... just stand in the middle and "mouth the words!" But after working with John, he was able to actually sing in a performance with the Gardens Chorale. He was very proud to be part of that concert. "This is a new and wonderful experience in our residents' senior years," says Gania. She invited several women who had never been part of a choir to join, and they said it was the most exciting thing they'd done in years!

Not everyone will be a standout, she acknowledges, "but if you encourage and inspire them to reach for the very best they can be, I think everyone can grow." Jane O'Donnell, who has years of experience working with novice and trained singers, agrees. "There are wonderful people who want to sing but are too embarrassed to try out. They should know there's lots of support and nobody criticizes." Novice singers are typically seated near strong singers so they can learn and grow. That's the beauty of group singing, according to Sherri. You can help one another. John points to the hard work that goes into singing in parts. But he also

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Gus Diesslin leads residents in song at Oak Tree Lodge, the Gardens' assisted living center.

"It's very much about the act of togetherness, the importance of being involved with others gives people this strong sense of connectedness and well-being."