

■ TownNews

New name, same great music

By Karolyn Coorsh

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Would a choir by any other name sound just as sweet?

You better believe it, says Jenny Crober, artistic director of the Voca Chorus of Toronto, formerly known as the East York Choir.

The 25-year-old group decided to officially change its name to better reflect the widespread geographical origins of its 100-strong members.

“Since 2006, we’ve been drawing people from across the city as choristers,” Crober said, adding members come from Scarborough, North York and parts of West Toronto.

The change in demographics led members and guest musicians alike to encourage a moniker change.

Back in 1986, the name was fitting, Crober says, as the group started out as strictly an East York ensemble.

Today, they are a larger organization but remain based in East York. The choir rehearses every Monday at Eastminster United Church on the Danforth, near Jackman Avenue.

The group performs various concerts throughout the year, but their biggest shows are held in June and December.

Crober announced the official name change at their Dec. 3 show. The founder of the choir, Stephanie Piercey Beames, who was in attendance as a guest soprano soloist, gave the name change her blessing.

“She’s thrilled,” Crober said, adding later: “The first thing she said to me was, ‘I don’t know what took you guys so long.’”

The name Voca came to Crober during a brainstorm over coffee with an associate.

“I had these Latin things in my head and they didn’t sound right, they sounded too stiff, it didn’t sound like us,” she said. “And then I wrote Vocum.”

That was abbreviated to Voca, which translates to “call” from Latin. It stuck, Crober, who has been conducting the choir since 2004.

Though most members have been supportive, there are a couple of members, who because of their close ties to the former borough, were quite disappointed, Crober says.

“They are such strong East Yorkers – in where they live, where they work, where they shop – so it was really a symbol to them, of something else sort of falling away.”

Crober says as a former East Yorker, she understands the rationale. She too, didn’t want to see the former borough’s character disappear with amalgamation.

“On the other hand, if you’re talking about being inclusive, and you’ve got a group of people most of whom are not from East York – you’ve got a problem.”

Apart from the name change, Crober says audiences, which are now typically 600-plus, can expect to hear the same eclectic mix of classical and contemporary music, including her own arrangements. They can also expect to see even more guest musicians join them from across Canada. Past guest talent has included jazz musician Michael Occhipinti, Celtic performer Loretto Reid, and African dancer and storyteller Adwoa Badoe.

Crober says she is hoping to take the choir to a festival in the future, as it has yet to travel for performances.

Voca Chorus of Toronto’s second annual cabaret is being held Saturday Feb. 25 at the Estonian House, 958 Broadview Avenue, at Fulton Avenue. For more information, visit vocachorus.ca.



PHOTO COURTESY VOCA CHORUS OF TORONTO
SING: Members of the Voca Chorus of Toronto, formerly known as the East York Choir, have decided to change the group’s name to better reflect the fact singers come from all over the city to perform with the group. While some were sad to see the East York part of the name go, the overall reaction to the rebranding has been positive.