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InlandChorus.com™ and Wright State University

InlandChorus.com is an archival website with the purpose of preserving and making widely available the history and music of the Inland Children's Chorus (1936-1970). The Chorus was an original and historically unique contribution by American industry to young people, the community, and the performing arts. The website works with Special Collections and Archives, located in the Wright State University Libraries in Dayton, Ohio, to collect and to preserve materials in the Inland Children's Chorus Collection.

Digital materials at InlandChorus.com

- ◆ Feature articles, photo essays, news clippings and concert reviews (over 150 in PDF format)
- ◆ Playable music files from records in-concert and studio recordings (over 200 audio files)
- ◆ Concert programs from 1936 to 1970 (100 many with autographs and reviews included)
- ◆ Professional concert chorus photos (37 from 1936-1965)
- ◆ Original news and personal photos and images of mementos (87 including slideshows)
- ◆ Forum-page comments and memories from former members and visitors (over 70 postings)

Brief History of the Inland Children's Chorus

The Chorus was sponsored from 1936 to 1970 by the Inland Manufacturing Division of General Motors Corporation to give 8-16 year old children of employees “a musical education and training which they otherwise might not be able to obtain, and to make a contribution to the cultural life of Inland employees and the community.” Inland's history: http://history.gmheritagecenter.com/wiki/index.php/Inland_Manufacturing_Division.

Inland's General Manager, Wallace Whittaker, hired the well-trained musician Richard B. Westbrook as the full-time director and Raymond Sovey, two-time Tony Award nominee and long-time Broadway theatrical designer, to stage the concerts. The Chorus regularly performed with the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra.

Supported enthusiastically by community institutions such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Dayton Art Institute, the Chorus has been described as “one of Dayton's greatest by-products of industry” (<http://inlandchorus.com/PDFs/DPO70AnnBk.pdf>).

The Chorus became well known through its widely popular and critically acclaimed concerts, national radio broadcasts, and television performances. Milton J. Cross, known as "the voice of the Metropolitan Opera," called the Chorus "one of the most unique and inspiring programs of its kind in the country."

Educating Young People through the Performing Arts

The Inland Children's Chorus represents how industry can make—in a single project—a substantial and multi-generational contribution to young people, the performing arts, and the community. Formed in the heart of the Great Depression, the Chorus demonstrates the courage and vision of the far-sighted individuals and a leading corporation who worked and invested generously to reach that goal.

CBS Sunday Morning reported on a Chorus America study finding that children who sing in choruses achieve academic success and develop valuable life skills. The history of the Inland Chorus offers a model for providing such opportunities to young people. See <http://inlandchorus.com/PDFs/2009-ca-study.pdf>.

As a 1966 graduate stated, "From my participation, I learned a love of good music, I acquired self-discipline, and I learned to sacrifice my wishes to do the best for the Chorus." This statement describes the education that thousands of young people received through the Inland Children's Chorus.

Another former member of the Chorus is Stephen Roddy, who now directs the Houston Children's Chorus which has performed for U.S. Presidents, at Carnegie Hall, and worldwide (www.houstonchildren.org/). Roddy writes that the Inland Children's Chorus was "an incredible influence on my life and career."

Inland Chorus Preservation Project

Gerald Alred, a former Chorus member (1951-1959) and professor of English and professional writing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, began digitizing Inland Children's Chorus records from his family's collection for himself and his cousin Fred Moore, also a Chorus member (1941 to 1947). Through a rare-music blog site (<http://musicyouwont.blogspot.com/>), he connected with other former Chorus members.

In 2009, he organized a lunch with former Chorus members that included himself; Fred Moore, his cousin and long-time member of the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra; Paul Thomas, a 35-year member of the Kim Kelly Orchestra; Jim Thomas, a retired sales executive, and their sister Diann (Thomas) Brown. They exchanged materials and considered how to preserve the music and history of the Chorus.

Based on his thirty years of teaching technical communication, publishing historical bibliographies and authoring widely-acclaimed textbooks in business and technical writing, Professor Alred developed the website <http://inlandchorus.com/> aimed at preserving and making widely available the history and music of the Inland Children's Chorus. His other goal was to find a permanent institutional home for these materials. For Alred's profile, see <https://people.uwm.edu/alred/professional-profile/>.

Professor Alred conducted substantial research and received support for the project from Jane Brock Woodall and Craig Orr at the Smithsonian Institution as well as Christo Datini, Lead Archivist at the General Motors Heritage Center. Mr. Datini praised the project for "documenting this portion of GM's history."

Those and other contacts led to enthusiastic interest from Special Collections and Archives, located in the Wright State University Libraries in Dayton, Ohio. Special Collections agreed to partner with Gerald Alred and InlandChorus.com to collect and to preserve materials related to the Inland Children's Chorus.

A front-page article describing this project appeared in August 2013 in the Sunday *Dayton Daily News* (D1, D4). Written by staff writer Meredith Moss with photos by Peter Wine, the article is available at <http://inlandchorus.com/PDFs/2013-A11-DDN-Feature.pdf>. A profile in April 2017 includes photos taken by noted photographer James Keen: <http://inlandchorus.com/PDFs/2017-A19-DDN-HistoryExtra.pdf>

Alred urges former members and others to help complete this history by (1) sharing comments and memories of Chorus at InlandChorus.com, (2) contributing photos, recordings, or other materials to the website, or (3) donating original materials to Special Collections and Archives (<http://libraries.wright.edu/special/>). For more information, visit InlandChorus.com or write info@inlandchorus.com. [Updated: March 2018]