

Ad Hoc Singers

Feminism in four-part harmony

"Half an hour to performance time"

Nine strong, confident women are doing gymnastics in the basement of the Doukhobor Cultural Centre, trying to use up some of the anxious energy...and then those wonderful expressive exercises that hopefully would eventually force us to smile while we were singing to all those people.

"Ten minutes"

Dressed in our black pants and white blouses, we repeatedly practiced our individual introductions of songs. We'd already rehearsed all the songs...outside, singing to the mountain, the full moon.

"Five minutes"

Rita had been at the Peace Conference all day. She told us that there was a young man from Guatemala in the audience. His family are political refugees, some of his friends were among the 'disappeared'. "Hay Una Mujer", a song about women missing in Chile, took on a stronger, more real meaning for all of us.

"The Images Ad Hoc Singers"

And there we were out there, turning our nervousness into excitement, performing well the songs we had by then become intimately involved with. After the performance, one of our friends in the audience said, "you were really good, but why were you so nervous?" Why indeed, especially after performing for that large group of firefighters who happened to show up during our rehearsal, to check out the Centre. So we have more work to do with our wonderful theatrics teacher, Valerie Laub, before we perform again.

After our first performance--they loved us, even though we were flat--we met the Euphoniously Feminist Non-Performing Quintet at the Kootenay Women's Festival. They taught us, besides some songs and style, that it's possible for non-musically trained feminists to learn from/with each other, and produce quality music. We added "Step By Step" to our repertoire.

Since then we have performed at: Castlegar Unemployment Action Centre Christmas party, International Women's Day celebrations, Kootenay Women's summer festivals, Vallican Whole benefits, IMAGES benefits and the International Youth Peace Conference. Singers and IMAGES collective members have come and gone over the years. Pat Griffiths (piano), Nicole Kayes (flute, guitar) and Lois Path (guitar) have accompanied us, and hopefully will again.

Some of our struggles, besides that of not being easily directed, have included: Ad Hoc singers not liking some of the songs we have performed, conflict of time between producing IMAGES and rehearsing for performances--we nearly always are producing a paper for the benefits where we sing--and difficulty giving feedback to women who can't carry a tune. Who are we to tell someone else that their musical ability is not adequate when we're not too sure about our own?

Why do we do this? We who work with IMAGES' wanted to spend more time together, having fun. There have always been some musically talented collective members. Initially, two of those women were going to perform solo at the benefit, but stage fright lead them to choosing to perform in a group instead. All of us like singing at political rallies and marches--that's the bread and roses of the struggle. And we were all involved in communicating our political ideas--now we can have political propoganda with harmony.

Demystifying music is an important part of feminism. The Euphoniously Feminist Non-Performing Quintet were effective role models for us. Our future plans include more rehearsals, performances and hopefully providing



Photo by Ray Masleck

Ad Hoc singers at the 1985 World Youth Peace through Communication conference, left to right:

Bev Bradshaw, Caroline Woodward, Sue Anderson, Rita Moir, Carol Beauchamp, Bonnie Baker, Joy Green and Norma Duggan.



At the 1976 IMAGES Benefit in Proctor, left to right: Nance Henne, Jackie Klingle, Ann Harvey, Marcia Braundy, Rita Moir and Moe Lyons.

inspiration for other feminist singers who want to share their musical talents.

We've come a long way, from the group of 8 feminists --mostly altos-- singing Christmas carols in the middle of typesetting and layout. Well, I suppose our development into a 4-part harmony choir started in 1976, when 6 IMAGES members--Marcia Braundy, Ann Harvey, Nancy Henne, Jackie Klingle, Moe Lyons and Rita Moir--first sang political songs at an IMAGES benefit in Proctor. In 1981, a women's theatre group formed in Nelson. "Women on Cue" performed on International Women's Day the following year. IMAGES brought Holly Near to Nelson, on July 15, 1982. Besides being generally

inspiring, she and Adrienne Torf did a couple of workshops, at which we all heard the messages that all people are musicians if they want to be, and that it's important for local groups to write and sing political songs. In the fall of that year, some women gathered at the women's centre regularly to sing songs about women, for fun and learning. There was a developing interest both in singing and in performing growing in the Nelson feminist community.

And then, in January 1983, we wondered who we would get to perform at the IMAGES benefit. I think it was Wendy Hurst who said, "Remember the Christmas carols...why don't we sing?" We became the IMAGES Ad Hoc Singers. Pam Evans, a 19 year old collective member and music student became our first music director and guided/pushed us into our first performance. We sang "Jerks", "Hay Una Mujer" and "Union Maids", I think not so well, at the benefit.

At this time the conflict of goals became evident. Were we just wanting to sing together or did we want to perform? If performers we would be, then we must practice more regularly, frequently and seriously. Well, we easily agreed to having a director, although not so easily to actually letting her direct us--imagine trying to direct a group of 8 feminists who talk a lot and think everything must be done collectively!

After Evans moved to Vancouver--from where she did still arrange a song for us and sent a lot of encouragement--Roma Sedgeman directed us. Evans taught us that we could do it, and Sedgeman taught us how to do it better, and that even those who can't read music have valuable musical skills. Bev Bradshaw and Lois Path currently direct us and sing with us, and are helping us to smooth out the rough edges.