

# Making Music in the Community for More than Two Decades

By Ed Henkler, President of the Dutch Fork Choral Society



Kaleb Hilton

In the late winter of 2000, Lill Mood and Mary K. Elsasser returned from a week of singing on St. Simons Island with a Road Scholar choral program. They lamented the lack of a local ensemble so that those glorious hours of singing a wide range of music could be more than a once-a-year experience. Upon

their return to Chapin, they learned that Mt. Horeb Lutheran Church had a new music minister, Gerald Tidwell. His dream was to extend choral singing to the broader community. With the help and support of church choir members like Jim Lindler, those seeds had been planted, and rehearsals were beginning.

The organization's first performance occurred during the Chapin Labor Day celebration in 2001. In the subsequent two decades, the group has rebranded from the Chapin Community Chorus to the Dutch Fork Choral Society, recognizing our broader reach for singers and audience members. Our musical leaders have been drawn from seasoned and beloved school and church choir directors. The list includes Marjorie Turner, Suzanne Ringer, Sarah High, and Nancy Gibbons. It also includes fresh faces and colleagues from the USC School of

Music, like Kirstina Rasmussen Collins, Lawrence Abernathy, Matthew Caine, Andrew Robinette, and Will Carswell, who have gone on to stellar careers in other places.

Our current director, Kaleb Hilton, leads the music programs at Blythewood High School. A side benefit of working with high school music teachers is the opportunity to perform with their top students, enriching all involved. Our directors helped us find extraordinary accompanists, like Amos Goldie, Frances Webb, William Douglas, and our own Bradley Fuller, who plays so beautifully that we sometimes forget to sing.

The names have changed over the years, as have our rehearsal and performance venues. Yet five of our founding members, Jim Lindler, Lill Mood, Mary K. Elsasser, Mary Wessinger, and Sherry Luzar, are still singing with us. That type of continuity is what music is all about: bridging generations and exposing the singers and audience members to familiar standards and beautiful new music. Our outreach to younger musicians includes all area high schools. Some students have found that DFCS participation counts toward their community service requirements. Just as important as engaging the next generation is promoting the quality of life of our adult members. The sense of belonging and community is also invaluable to older members.

We have reached out to many area churches, both for new members and audiences for the performances. Our focus is also on creating an intentional, inclusive environment for singers with disabilities. While they will be required to meet the same eligibility criteria as any other singer; we are happy to discuss accommodations that may be appropriate to ensure optimal accessibility for all.



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Dutch Fork Choral Society has weekly two-hour rehearsals and one Saturday retreat in the Fall to dive more deeply into a few pieces while building fellowship amongst the members. This improves our vocal performance and contributes to group culture.

**What do our members say?**

*"I sing in the choir because I love to sing, and the sound of cool music is a lovely respite in a busy life. It uplifts a weary soul."*

*"It helps fulfill the need in my soul to use the talents that God has given me. And it gives me great joy."*

*"Choir is therapy to me. Singing is uplifting. But the fleeting moments when all our hard work comes together and produces something beyond what any of us could do alone are magical."*

We are committed to performing a wide variety of music, including classical, both religious and secular; gospel and spirituals; country and folk; pop and Broadway. Are you a singer? Are you ready to join us? Maybe you only sing in the shower, in which case we'd love to entertain you.

**Our next two concerts are:**

May 3rd, 7 pm, at Lake Murray Presbyterian Church, and May 5th, 4 pm, at Mt. Horeb Lutheran Church.

More details are available on our website: <https://dutchforkchoralsociety.com/>

Are you interested in showcasing your organization to your Chapin neighbors? Reach out to [aprilrobinson@bestversionmedia.com](mailto:aprilrobinson@bestversionmedia.com) for more information.

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