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# WEEKEND BREAK

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## Connecting through music in Barcelona

### Astoria's North Coast Chorale sings songs of peace in Spain

By **DENISE REED**  
 For EO Media Group

**A** brief encounter with another human being via music is sometimes worth weeks of encounters via words.

In late December 2016, the North Coast Chorale, of which I am the conductor, received an invitation from the International Federation of Choral Music, an organization that holds a World Symposium on Choral Music every three years in different locations around the world. The 11th symposium was to be held in Barcelona, Spain, and we were to be part of a special new series called "Circle Concerts," held in various venues in and around the city.

This seemed like a wonderful opportunity for a small choir from a small community in the Pacific Northwest. The crucial requirement was that we present music reflecting the symposium's theme: The Colors of Peace.

The main problem was financial: Several chorale members were unable to finance a singing trip such as this. But with the help of devoted supporters and community members, we were able to get to Barcelona and represent Astoria, sharing our songs of peace.

I arrived on the afternoon of July 17 after several long flights. Barcelona is a bustling city with a very diverse cosmopolitan atmosphere and a vibrant history of choral music. In the late 1800s, José Anselmo Clavé, the composer who founded the choral movement in Spain, had established a choral group of farmers and woodcutters. He came up with the idea of encouraging the local workforce to exchange their leisure time in the taverns for choir practice.

Some North Coast Chorale members, including myself, were also performing with a touring choir, the Jonathan Griffith Singers, which do not sing together regularly but come together under a distinguished choir director, Jonathan Griffith, and perform major choral works in venues all over the world. By coincidence, the two groups performed in and around Barcelona on overlapping days.

During the North Coast Chorale's concert, there were concerts by other groups taking place in Barcelona, including at the main symposium venue, L'auditori, a part of the Barcelona University system.

#### Music of peace

The North Coast Chorale's first concert, on July 22, was at Sant Pere de les Puelles, a 16th century chapel in Barcelona. We only performed half of our "Peace" repertoire, as we shared the venue with the Shanghai Children's Chorus who performed most of their repertoire in Mandarin or Cantonese. They were very well prepared, and their performance was exceptional.

Our performance was also well received and an enjoyable experience for the Chorale members, who connected with strangers through sharing our music. We — the North Coast Chorale and the Shanghai Children's Chorus — were able to connect through the music, though we could not understand every word. It was the music that connected us, and our emotional delivery that revealed our meaning.

At our second concert, on July 24, we performed the entire "Journey in Peace" program that we had performed for our Astoria audience in early June. The location was just as beautiful as our first venue, and the acoustics were amazing.

It was a small chapel, the Capella de l'Esperança, in another area of Barcelona. On this occasion, we delivered our message of peace to an audience of choral directors from many different countries and Catalonian community members. We received a standing ovation. One of the volunteers working for the International Federation of Choral Music at our venue thanked me for bringing this choir to share this music with the symposium and our audience.

Maybe it's something that only I recognized, but the international audience was one of the most receptive I have experienced. Our music as a community choir was less sophisticated than most of the other professional groups, but it seemed closer to the style and content of the music of the Catalonian choirs.

What I enjoyed most was the diversity of choirs from different cultures and countries, and how they expressed themselves musically. I experienced exhibitions, lectures and presentations, and a



Submitted Photos  
 Denise Reed (left), conductor of the North Coast Chorale, with Phyllis Taylor (center) and Cheryl Capellen. The three women are North Coast Chorale singers who also performed with the Jonathan Griffith Singers in Barcelona at the same time.



The North Coast Chorale sings during its final concert at the Capella de l'Esperança, a chapel in Barcelona.



The Shanghai Children's Chorus

variety of glorious music. Many concerts were performed at such historical places as the Sagrada Família and the Paulau de la Musica Catalana. I left word with the federation officials that Astoria and the North Coast Chorale would be more than willing to host any of the choirs that might undertake an American tour.

#### Singing for life

I had a chance to speak with the federation president who said with the first year they had offered the opportunity for choirs to participate in the "Circle Concerts." Their purpose: to continue the concept of community choirs, since these offer the opportunity to continue singing

for life.

And that, he said, is what singing in choral organizations was all about, and what the International Federation of Choral Music is about: Raising the awareness of the need for Choral music in every community around the world.

So Astoria: We carried our message of peace halfway around the world and connected on a personal level with people we may never meet again. But, even if we connected with only one person, we accomplished our goal.

Thanks to our many community supporters who offered financial help and words of encouragement. We could not have made this "Journey in Peace" without you.

Please consider joining the Chorale this fall as we continue to connect with more people in our community. Rehearsals are at 6:45 p.m. Tuesdays beginning Sept. 5 at Clatsop Community College Performing Arts Center at Franklin Avenue and 16th Street.

Denise Reed is the conductor of the North Coast Chorale and a member of the Oregon Humanities Board of Directors. She teaches opera and music appreciation, along with world music and the histories of some of America's popular styles of music at Clatsop and Tillamook Bay community colleges.