

Portrait of Womansong of Asheville

By Mirra Price

“Who cares about the clouds when we’re together? Just sing a song and bring the sunny weather.” —Dale Evans, “Happy Trails”

In a series of interviews with chorus members this past spring, the women who make up Womansong of Asheville have expressed their feelings about the chorus we all love.

Linda Metzner, Womansong founder, director from 1987-1994, explains: “The thought of women singing together in harmony filled me with delight . . . forming community for each other, and that feeling of “village” is sorely missing in many women’s lives today.”

In 1994 Debbie Nordeen became director of Womansong, and is still serving in that position. She discusses her goals for the chorus: “To continue to sing songs together that stir the soul—that bring harmony to the soul and shine light on issues of social justice.” Womansong also has two assistant directors—Althea Gonzalez and Sarah Rubin.

Womansong performs two major public concerts a year and sings at several local events. The experience of rehearsing the music for these concerts is sometimes joyful, sometimes tiring, but it is always rewarding. Patty Chakales says, “We have such good leadership that my fears seem to melt away when we take our positions and Debbie gives us a great big smile and Lyte plays our first chord.”

Besides rehearsals and performances, Womansong is also a village, a community of women who help one another, providing support, and offering encouragement and assistance to our sisters in song. Roberta Newman, a founding member states, “We find comfort, support and healing for one another in times of illness and/or grief. We have social events. . . . We share plants for our gardens . . . clothing, books . . .”

Assistant director Althea Gonzalez says, “When one has a strong nest, one can fly confidently. Knowing that I have this nest helps me in other parts of my life.”

There are similarities between women singing together and the consciousness-raising groups of forty years ago. In the 1960s and 70s era of social change, many women felt invisible, locked into traditional gender roles. Hence, the women’s liberation movement was born, in which women worked together to support the empowerment and solidarity of our sisters.

Part of Womansong’s mission is to work for social justice through song. Assistant director Sarah Rubin says, “I was in consciousness raising groups. I think there are similarities—the sense of sisterhood, in Womansong the bonds we have are similar to the bonds I felt within these groups.”

Another way that Womansong works for social justice is with direct support through its own charity. The New Start Program, begun by Linda Metzner, has expanded to giving not only small

grants to women in the community who are in transition, but also scholarships to women in local colleges. Marilyn Hubbard, New Start Program Co-chair, states:

I really feel [The New Start Program] is what sets Womansong apart from most other choruses. . . . We have in the past ten years given over \$100,000. . . . We are giving funds to three area institutions: Haywood, Blue Ridge and AB Tech Community Colleges.

Womansong's repertoire is varied, consisting of light hearted, fun songs and some with serious themes. Bobby McFerrin's "Don't Worry, Be Happy," Erik Lane Barnes' "Caffeine Overload Polka," and "Happy" by Pharrell Williams are fun and light-hearted. More serious themed songs include "Tender Lady" by Margie Adam, "I Come From Women" by Amy Carol Webb ([listen here](#)), and "My Sisters" by Womansong's own accompanist and songwriter, Lytingale ([listen here](#)).

Womansong carries a powerful message of concern for the well-being, empowerment, and leadership of today's women by its support of feminist messages through a strong, cohesive, supportive community, also bringing inspiring music and a feeling of oneness to its audiences and to the larger community through beautiful, uplifting performances.