

Welsh Choir returns to raise voices for Welcome Table



By Brock Weir

Volunteers at Welcome Table devote hours of their time to the organization's weekly meal for people in need, but recently they have been getting the hang of making buttery, currant-filled Welsh cakes.

Welcome Table isn't necessarily flexing their international culinary muscles, but getting everything in place for next Saturday when the Toronto Welsh Male Voice Choir lifts up the community through song at Trinity Anglican Church.

The internationally recognized chorus, which boasts several Trinity members among its ranks, returns to the church on December 10 following their first smash concert at the church two years ago.

Featuring an eclectic program of Welsh, Canadian and International pieces, and some chosen to reflect the sounds of the season, the concert not only features what promises to be a moving performance, but an intermission where Welsh cakes come into the spotlight.

"Our first mission is to bring pleasure because we ourselves enjoy singing with this four-part harmony," says choir member John Hitchmough, a driving force behind the Trinity concert. "We enjoy the camaraderie, with anywhere from 30 ? 40 guys, depending on the time of year and events. This year we have [choir members performing] coming in from as far as Bowmanville on the east and Guelph on the west."

The four-part harmony of the Welsh choir is unique among choruses and something which invariably sparks an emotional reaction in the listener. Two winters ago, Joy Marshall was among them. Her interest in the choir was sparked last year when they first visited Trinity. Outside of rehearsals she was only able to hear them from a distance as she and her fellow volunteers at Welcome Table were busy preparing the event's "Afterglow," which provides a hot meal for the choir members.

Not content with hearing the final performance from a distance, she picked up some of their CDs after the show and, almost a year later of listening to them at home and in the car, she's almost ready to join the men as a female soloist.

She shies away from the suggestion but is nevertheless eager to welcome them back to Trinity, particularly as a fundraiser for Welcome Table.

"Most of the people who come in are in need of some sort in terms of financial assistance, but it is also for people who need to get out and have a social time," says Ms. Marshall who, after starting out as a volunteer, is now the coordinator of Welcome Table. "For our seniors who are on pensions and are by themselves, they absolutely love coming every week. The dinner is totally self-sufficient, run by donations, and we have 100 volunteers, four teams, and four chefs who come and volunteer their time every week."

But in the darkness of the last gasps of autumn and the dawn of winter on the horizon, Welcome Table is need of assistance now more than ever.

"I find around late fall it starts to pick up as it gets darker and colder and damper," says Ms. Marshall. "People are looking to get in out of the cold and have a wonderful meal. At Christmas, we do have a special Christmas meal. This year it will be December 28.

The food is usually donated by several people and they get little gifts and we try to make it a bit special. For many people, it is their only Christmas dinner.

?For many, it is their only chance to have a real Christmas dinner with people who care about them. The thing that makes Welcome Table special for me is the people who volunteer, without a doubt, get more out of being there than often people who are our guests. There is no question. One lady said to me that the only other person who talks to her during the week is at Welcome Table. Think about that. That stuck with me. For someone like me who volunteers on a regular basis at Welcome Table, often it is a Wednesday night, you're tired, and it is the middle of the week, and you come and the energy from the volunteers and the people preparing the food, it is like you forget that you're tired and it is quite wonderful.?

As the clock counts down for the December 10 concert, you're out of luck if you want to sample the meal the Welcome Table volunteers have been planning for the Afterglow following the performance as it is sold out. Tickets for the performance itself, however, are still available from Trinity Anglican Church by calling 905-727-6101 or visiting www.welshchoir.ca.

The show gets underway at 7.30 p.m.

Tickets are \$25.