

A Chronological List of Recent Choral CDs by Choirs of Newfoundland

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A Chronological List of Recent Choral CDs by Choirs of Newfoundland

DOUGLAS DUNSMORE

1993. *Holy Heart of Mary Chamber Choir* (Susan Quinn, conductor). St. John's: Holy Heart of Mary School.
1996. *And Until We Meet Again* (Susan Quinn, conductor). St. John's: Holy Heart of Mary School.
1996. *Rock Within the Sea*. Newfoundland Symphony Youth Choir (Susan Knight, conductor). St. John's: CBC and the Newfoundland Symphony Youth Choir.
1998. *Reaching from the Rock*. Newfoundland Symphony Youth Choir (Susan Knight, conductor). St. John's: Newfoundland Symphony Youth Choir.
1999. *CV*. Cantus Vocum (Chad Stride, conductor). St. John's: Cantus Vocum Chamber Choir (FMCA 4609 2).
1999. *At the Rim of the Carol-Singing Sea*. Newfoundland Symphony Youth Choir (Susan Knight, conductor). St. John's: Newfoundland Symphony Youth Choir.
1999. *One Heart Among Us* (Susan Quinn, conductor). St. John's: Holy Heart of Mary School.
2000. *Choral Voyages*. Cantus Vocum (Chad Stride, conductor). St. John's: Cantus Vocum Chamber Choir (WRC8-7464).
2001. *Full Circle*. Newfoundland Symphony Youth Choir (Susan Knight, conductor). St. John's: Newfoundland Symphony Youth Choir.
2001. *Ave Maris Stella*. Quintessential Vocal Ensemble (Susan Quinn, conductor). St. John's: CBC Radio, Newfoundland Symphony.
2001. *Choral Performances 2001*. St. John's: Festival 500 — Sharing the Voices.
2002. *CV Christmas*. Cantus Vocum (Chad Stride, conductor). St. John's: Cantus Vocum Chamber Choir (WRC8-7665).
2003. *A Quintessential Christmas*. Quintessential Vocal Ensemble (Susan Quinn, conductor). St. John's: QVE.

2004. *Quest*. Shallaway (formerly the Newfoundland Symphony Youth Choir) (Susan Knight, conductor). St. John's: Newfoundland Symphony Youth Choir.
2004. *CV Spirit*. Cantus Vocum (Chad Stride, conductor). St. John's: Cantus Vocum Chamber Choir (WRC8-7665).
2006. *CV Home*. Cantus Vocum (Chad Stride, conductor). St. John's: Cantus Vocum Chamber Choir (WRC8-7926).
2006. *and if you close your eyes*. Quintessential Vocal Ensemble (Susan Quinn, conductor). St. John's: QVE.
2006. *Lady Cove*. Lady Cove Women's Choir (Kellie Walsh, conductor). St. John's: Lady Cove Women's Choir.

WHEN I WAS FIRST ASKED TO REVIEW choral CD releases of choirs in this province, it seemed to be an impossible task. How could one give a qualitative review of so many recordings in just one article? The solution to this problem (like so many others in life) is elegantly simple. An attempt is made to provide a general overview of some of the choral recordings that have been generated in the recent (and in some cases, not so recent) past in Newfoundland and Labrador. Of course, these recordings do not represent the entire collection available to the listening public, but they do indicate considerable breadth and depth of repertoire and reflect the substantial quality of much of the choral works which have been recorded here.

In fact, in Newfoundland and Labrador there have been pockets of fine choral music for decades. Vinyl recordings made by singers under the baton of Ignatius Rumboldt helped the Newfoundland style burst onto the national scene decades ago. From his extensive work in the 1950s and 1960s, came *Newfoundlanders Sing Songs of their Homeland*,¹ featuring many favourite settings of traditional Newfoundland songs. With the advent of Memorial University (and subsequently, the Memorial University School of Music) more and more musicians were trained as music teachers, and as these teachers took their place in the communities throughout the province, the level of amateur choral music continued to rise, as it still continues to do.

To help provide enrichment for you as a reader, you will find that website addresses have been provided wherever possible so that some background of the groups and their creations including detailed histories and complete play lists for each CD. Wherever possible, I have used the text written by the choirs themselves to help provide the flavour of these rich compilations of choral art.²

The groups discussed in this article are Cantus Vocum (Chad Stride, conductor), Shallaway (formerly the Newfoundland Symphony Youth Choir) (Susan Knight and Ki Adams, conductors), the Quintessential Vocal Ensemble (Susan Quinn, conductor), and Holy Heart of Mary Chamber Choir (Susan Quinn, conductor). All these conductors (except for Ki Adams) received their undergraduate music degrees from the MUN School/Department of Music, a fact that I, as a long-time member of the music faculty, am very proud to highlight.

CANTUS VOCUM CHAMBER CHOIR

www.cantusvocum.com

Cantus Vocum [CV] was founded in 1995 by its current conductor, Chad Stride. The name Cantus Vocum translates as “the musical sound of voices.” This twenty-voice chamber choir has been recognized and praised for its musical artistry. Their website indicates that members of CV are auditioned on an annual basis and currently represent professions of law, dentistry, education, engineering, information technology, and real estate. Their repertoire spans from the Renaissance to the 21st century. While the choir performs mainly classical repertoire, they also include folksongs, spirituals, and light popular music in their programming.

The choir has been extremely busy artistically and as leaders within the community. As such, one will find them supporting many important causes in addition to their own concerts — the annual CBC radio reading of the Christmas Carol by local personalities, fundraising events for social and community causes and, for the last three presentations of the St. John’s biannual international choral festival, Festival500, CV has been the laboratory choir for the master classes in conducting with world-renowned conductors.

In its relatively short history, CV has created five CDs. Conductor Chad Stride summarizes these discs:

CV is the choir’s first recording project with folk, light popular culture and classical repertoire from Newfoundland and beyond. By the early 21st century, the recording had sold out and was unavailable. *Choral Voyages* is the repertoire list for Cantus Vocum’s first International Tour in 2000, when they performed in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London and basilicas in the Netherlands. *CV Christmas* is a collection of carols, including many arrangements by Canadian composers. *CV Spirit* was a project developed from an opportunity to work with the gospel music icon, Dr. Horace Boyer, a contemporary of Mahalia Jackson.

Stride describes *CV Home* as “our proudest collection as it honours our Newfoundland and Labrador heritage. In addition to featuring songs representing our Province’s past and present, it also highlights nine new commissions.”

SHALLAWAY (FORMERLY, THE NEWFOUNDLAND SYMPHONY YOUTH CHOIR)

<http://www.nsync.nf.ca/>

Shallaway — Newfoundland and Labrador Youth in Chorus — is a community-based cultural organization guided by a thirteen-member Board of Directors and an

Honourary Advisory Board. Founded by Artistic Director, Susan Knight, Shallaway comprised 220 young artists by 2006. Choristers between the ages of 8 and 18 are from the urban and rural environs of St. John's. They describe their vision as "the valuing, promoting and transmitting of Newfoundland and Labrador's distinctive and rich culture." Their website explains the organizational structure: the Youth Choir is the senior group comprised of 105 choristers. The Youth Choir has within it two independent choirs, Jubilate and Camerata. With 51 members, Jubilate, whose average age is 13, represents the younger members of the Youth Choir and tours provincially. Camerata, whose average age is 15, has 54 members and tours nationally and internationally. In 1993, the organization expanded to offer a preparatory choral experience to a 110-member Children's Chorus comprised of a 65-member girls' ensemble and a 35-member boys' ensemble. The Shallaway website provides detailed descriptions of each recording and offers audio highlights.

The folk music legacy of Newfoundland was used as the focus of the choir's debut recording *Rock Within the Sea: Folksongs of Newfoundland*, released in May 1996, with guest artist Anita Best. They note that they "are proud that it is the first choral album of our folksongs in 20 years and it is a 'collection-must' for students and fans of our folk music everywhere." Produced in collaboration with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the album contains fifteen classic songs, most of them arranged by Newfoundlanders. It was given an East Coast Music Award [ECMA] for the Best Classical Recording, 1996.

Their second recording, *Reaching from the Rock*, "embraces the music of many global cultures in addition to our own Newfoundland and Canadian traditions. Released in 1998, it seeks to address the choir's mandate of reaching out to the world through the medium of choral excellence. There is much diversity in this collection with a large sprinkling of international works and many languages." It too won an ECMA for Best Classical Recording in 2000.

The third recording, *At the Rim of the Carol — Singing Sea*, released in December 1999, featured Gordon Pinsent reading Dylan Thomas's *A Child's Christmas in Wales*. Performances by all four Shallaway ensembles were featured in a contemporary version of the traditional festival of lessons and carols, Thomas's narrative is separated into defined sections, linked together by carols. CBC TV filmed an hour-long Christmas special based on the CD with the choirs and Gordon Pinsent. It was broadcast throughout Atlantic Canada. The CD was given an ECMA for Best Classical Recording in 2001.

Full Circle was released in April 2001. A CD solely of Stephen Hatfield's works, it was made at the invitation of the composer. Featuring all four Shallaway choirs, as well as an Icelandic choir and the Mi'kmaq choir from Conne River, Newfoundland, the CD includes two compositions commissioned by Shallaway, *Best in the House* and *Full Circle*.

The title for their latest CD, *Quest*, reflects the fact that "from our outset, Shallaway has been engaged in a 'quest' to try to strengthen the culture of our place

at a time when it was threatened by social and economic challenges occasioned by the cod moratorium of 1992. What became obvious, as more of our alumni graduated and communicated with us, was that their Shallaway experience had a profound impact on their way of thinking, acting and feeling in the world. Essentially, we became aware that in addition to helping develop young people with a strong cultural identity and global perspective, we had also helped imbue them with the qualities of leadership. This insight has helped to redefine our ‘quest’ at a time when leadership for our future has become of paramount import.”

HOLY HEART OF MARY CHOIR

This prominent high school choir has its roots in the Roman Catholic school system. It flourished thanks to the work of many dedicated sisters, among them Sister Katherine Bellamy and Sister Barbara O’Keefe, as well as its present conductor, Susan Quinn, under whose leadership it has distinguished itself on many fronts.

The self-titled *The Holy Heart of Mary Chamber Choir*, the first of three CDs, released in 1993, emerged during only the second year of the choir’s existence in the SATB format, after educational policy that changed Holy Heart from an all girls school to a co-ed institution. The CD was recorded at the D.F. Cook Hall, Memorial University, and was nominated for an ECMA. The repertoire includes a wide variety of styles — Victoria’s “Ave Maria,” Gibbons’s “Silver Swan,” madrigals, short mass movements, a sprinkling of Newfoundland folksongs and a rendition of Schafer’s “Epitaph for Moonlight.” Despite being done thirteen years ago, this recording is an excellent representation of a choral spectrum of possibilities.

Their second CD, *And Until We Meet Again*, in 1996, was prompted by the choir’s tour to the International Youth Music Festival in Vienna, Austria. Works by Hassler, Bruckner, and C.V. Stanford are combined with Newfoundland and Irish folk melodies.

In 1999, the third CD, *One Heart Among Us*, came into being as part of the celebration of the 40th anniversary of Holy Heart of Mary School. This recording ranges more toward popular music with a particular bent towards contemporary composers in the US and Canada.

QUINTESSENTIAL VOCAL ENSEMBLE

www.qve.ca

The dynasty of fine choral singing at Holy Heart created a large group of talented singers who very much desired to keep their musical experiences and friendships alive as long as possible after high school, eventually culminating in the formation

of the Quintessential Vocal Ensemble [QVE]. Originally, its membership consisted predominantly of graduates from Holy Heart of Mary.

In the liner notes of *Ave Maris Stella*, released in 2001, choir member Michael Rosales elegantly describes QVE as “one of Newfoundland’s most accomplished choirs, known for its diverse repertoire and high standards of performance.” This disc supports that point of view, featuring performances that display a warmth and maturity that can only come from a seasoned group of young adults under very musical leadership. *Ave Maris Stella* is a sacred a cappella treasury of anthems, motets, and spirituals of the past 150 years, presented with the sensitivity and musicality that has earned renown for QVE. The choir’s debut recording, the CD was produced by CBC Radio Newfoundland & Labrador and nominated for an ECMA.

A Quintessential Christmas is a beautiful new CD offering traditional carols, contemporary pop favourites, and new a cappella compositions. Their website describes it as “suffused with the warm glow of the choir’s richly textured harmony and blend, the album brings the Christmas spirit to life in music spanning 500 years of history.”

On the heels of a very successful tour to Ireland in the spring of 2006, the choir recorded their third album, *and if you close your eyes*, with some exciting and varied repertoire including: Dobbin’s “Flowery Vale” — trad. Irish, arr. Matti Kallio; “Rise Up My Love, My Fair One” — Healey Willan; “Haec Dies” — William Byrd; “Water Night” — Eric Whitacre; and “Ave Verum Corpus” — Imant Raminsh, to name but a few.

LADY COVE

The newest women’s choir in St. John’s under the direction of Kellie Walsh released its first CD in the fall of 2006. Works by Canadian, Finnish, and English composers, as well as traditional arrangements are featured. The choir won the Equal Voice Female division of the CBC National Radio Competition for Amateur Choirs in 2006.

MUN CHAMBER CHOIR

Winner of the University Choir division of the CBC Radio competition in 2006, the Memorial University Chamber Choir is in the process of producing a two-disc retrospective of choral music at Memorial University over the last 50 years. It will feature cuts from earlier recordings under the batons of Ignatius Rumboldt, and Donald F. Cook and will present several works recently recorded by the university choir under its present conductor, Douglas Dunsmore, including the live performances in the past two CBC competitions.

This is not a definitive list of choral recordings in the province, but rather a retrospective of some of the more prominent and prolific creators of CDs for the listening public.

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Notes

¹*Newfoundlanders Sing Songs of Their Homeland* (Ignatius Rumboldt, conductor). St. John's Extension Choir (SJEC 1001), 1996.

²All quotations are from the choirs' websites unless otherwise indicated.

