

In Praise of The Big Brave Bold Altos of the Back Rows

The Big Brave Bold Altos of the Back Rows have to be among the most intrepid singers in the Alto section of the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir. Singers in the back rows of a large choir have to meet the challenges of hearing and seeing their conductor clearly; they have to be confident in their singing as they stand at the margins of their section, and cannot always determine if they are fully synchronized with the rest of the choir. It may be hard for them to hear the full harmonies intended by the composer because voices in the lower risers project away from the singers standing above them. As one blog writer advised: *The back row should be reserved for those who really know what they are doing since there is very little reinforcement of the part from other singers.* Our Big Brave Bold Altos love their partners, children, grandchildren, dogs, cats and most humans. They share a meal before a rehearsal, and post their joy in these friendships on social media. They may be businesswomen, court reporters, professionals, or retired. They are people-whisperers and newbie-encouragers. Above all, they are singers with beautiful voices who know what they are doing, while standing on those rear risers.

I have long admired these courageous commanders of the Alto section; I felt joining their ranks would mean I had finally achieved the singing journey I embarked on as a newbie singer nearly 6 years ago. So when I was recently assigned to the high middle row of the choir, I felt I was on my way to be a Big Brave Bold singer too. Alas, my hopes were to be dashed. I stood with my choir book out, ready to sing my heart out and looked ahead. Panic! No sight of the conductor. I was singing into the shapely gowns and tuxedos in front of me! My Pilates instructor had advised, if your forward path is ever blocked, think of your voice resonating sideways as it leaves your body. I checked the sides - more shapely gowns, heads of hair and tuxes. I was doomed - not having a sight line to the conductor is the lowest level of hell for a chorister! I was standing deep in a well of black - my genetics, which had determined my short adult height would be a tad above 5 feet "tall", meant I would never move to the coveted back row.

As I stood in despair, I heard above me the most glorious sound cascading from the high rows behind me - there was the melody, the harmony, the tempo and diction, streaming out to the audience. The Big Brave Bold Altos were in full swing - the gorgeous legato of "I will light candles"; the delicate atmospheric harmonies of "Winter Wonderland"; the gospel swing of "Jesus"; and the funny patter song lines of "Boas Festes" (Happy Holidays sung in Portuguese) swirled above and around me. Like a trout sighting the juiciest of flies, my voice rose in gratitude to join the song of the Big Brave Bold Altos.

Please join us for our "Festival of Carols" concerts at The Palladium in Carmel from December 21-23. Let your voice rise in melody with ours in Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" from the Messiah as we end our concert.