



A TALENTED ENSEMBLE

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“The two rules you must never break, while in a choir,” according to Alena Pyne, the founder and conductor of Doha Youth Choir (DYC), “first you must sing, and secondly keep all the negative energy out.” As this young group of singers gets ready to be hosted by families in Germany for their next performance along with Madchenchor Cantata Chiara Hamburg, Alena gives us an insight into what makes the DYC so special.

“YOU

have to have the passion for music to commit yourself to a choir. All my students are brilliantly learning their way through their musical talent. My own son has about seven choir practices a week with different choir communities and I keep him motivated to go through all this because of his natural talent,” says Alena. Singing requires a lot of effort, practice and of course talent. Teaching more than 45 students from as many as, 14 different nationalities can be a quite a task. “I explain to parents how important it is to get together at least twice a week and they love that their children are learning and having fun at the same time,” says Alena and there is also the cultural experience that students learn from, adding to the overall experience of musical education.

While music has been an important part of their experience, recently the NYC are up against a major challenge that will showcase the talent of both the choir singers and the tenacity of the founder. The Doha Youth Choir has been invited by the Madchenchor Canta Chiara to perform in Berlin and Hamburg. The young team of singers is gearing up for this journey of music. But this journey has not been an easy ride for Alena. This group was in turn, recently hosted by American School of Doha families on their visit to perform in Qatar.

The journey of the NYC began in September 2013 when Alena packed her bags and settled in Doha with husband John and her three children. “I started this because, firstly I recognized that a lot of kids were attending schools that didn’t have a dedicated choir. Secondly, I have very musical children. I wanted to have a choir that would be of sufficient quality for them. My eldest son is in Vienna for the same reason. There are a lot of expat children who wouldn’t be exposed to the wonderful qualities of choral singing and the repertoire of music that is completely lost,” says Alena. From then began her tireless efforts of forming a small group of gifted singers.

“This is a community choir. These songs are of a secular and non-secular nature but not attached to any religion or an institution or belief. They also sing to the likes of Justin Bieber,” she says.

The most amazing opportunity that came knocking on her door was the call from Madchenchor last year. “Many girls in the choir were singing for a long time. Here we were, still finding our notes. They sounded like Ferraris’ compared to our Fiats’,” she adds on a lighter note. “I just had to be brave and seize the opportunity and had to look only at the positives that could come out of this. It can only serve to raise our standards and encourage these kids to take part in the choral repertoire that they offer and also make a trip abroad. Many in the choir have never been to Europe.”

There are currently 14 different nationalities in the choir including students from Belgium, Finland, South Korea, New Zealand, Canada, Indonesia, Ireland, India, Sri Lanka, USA,

Malaysia, Germany, Philippines and a few English along the way.

“We started off with 26 students in September 2013 and after the first concert in December 2014 our strength increased to 43 for the April concert. Our biggest challenge is the turnover of singers in the choir. It’s very difficult to keep up with expats moving in and out of the country. It is compulsory to attend the rehearsals which the parents have made sure of. Practice can be done from literally anywhere, even while moving in the car from point A to B. Culturally, parents from the Asian side of the world

are more committed and appreciative of choir practices and they know why it is so important,” she says.

Speaking about the availability of sheet music in Doha, she says there are hardly any shops here to purchase from. “The sheet music is so efficient for rehearsals and so it is important to make students understand why it is necessary to buy the music. We need publishers to be operating in 20-30 years. I have bought so much music and I’m really excited to start using it.”

Lyrics of foreign language music are usually translated, so students understand the words with their correct pronunciation and emotion. “Students of music (choir kids) generally, are intelligent. At the moment, we are singing in German, Czech, Finnish and are also rehearsing on a beautiful Indian song. A lot of our music is

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contemporary.”

The Doha Junior Choir, which is an offshoot of NYC, consists of a younger age group of singers.

Speaking about the parameters of assessing students in a choir, she says the two most important forms of evaluation are the passion for singing and the efforts they put into practice; and if they are singing in tune in a proper pitch. “It’s quite magical to see them blossom; not just with my own kids but also all the students that come to learn.”

“This is a peaceful happy group of students, teachers and families. We as organizers take the occasional night-out to bond and involve in each other’s social lives. On a broader level, families of the choir are invited for a day out either for bowling, picnics or the movies,” says Alena.

Coming back to the most exciting five-day trip for the Doha Youth Choir, 36 students (total 41 including staff) will be traveling to

Berlin and Hamburg to sing their way into the hearts of the choir communities there. “We will be housed by the choir families and be treated the German way, making it an enriching experience exploring the food and the town of Hamburg. If we stayed in a hotel, it will be less appealing.”

This is the story of perseverance and dedication of all, but mostly Alena’s, whose single-minded efforts in getting to make the NYC popular, to raise enough funds so that the children could all fly to their musical destination. “We couldn’t have made this journey possible without KLM Dutch Airlines who offered us a great discount for our travel plans. We were still short of about QR35,000 and after knocking on several doors and after a recommendation by a dear friend, a Qatari sponsor stepped forward to encourage us and donated the money to make this trip a complete success,” says Alena.

“Katrin Meingast, the cellist, is an assistant teacher and conductor of Doha Junior Choir, and is so central to what we do with the community as a musician and is the oldest member of the choir along with me. Our administrator, Maralyn Sargunam does a great job at keeping me on my heels and updated with everything that is required at the operational level. Our funds are generally made up of the ticket sales at the concerts and a minimal fee at the time of admissions, reveals Alena.

The main purpose of the Doha Youth Choir is to inspire young people to sing and to educate them about the wealth of choral music.

NYC’s next concert will feature Doha Youth & Junior Choirs, at the International German School on March 19, at 3pm.
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