

Sweet harmony for beaches senior singers

Group has kept songs going strong for 23 years under conductor Schumann.

Kelli McDaniel
The Recorder

Singers by the Sea, a 60 member senior singing group in Jacksonville Beach, is preparing for their final performance of the season scheduled for May 5.

The group sings in a four-part harmony and is directed by Becky Schumann, who has been conducting the chorus for 23 years.

The position as conductor became available in 1989 and Schumann took the opportunity even though she had no classical training in music. However, she has been involved in music her whole life, she said, and has learned the role of conducting through experience. Her father was a Methodist Minister and he brought Schumann and her younger sister to retirement homes, churches and even jails to sing.

Schumann is loved by her choir. Carolyn Evans, who has been a member of Singers by the Sea for 13 years, said that Schumann is an amazing director



Kelli McDaniel/The Recorder

Singers by the Sea practices each Thursday morning, and is currently preparing for the season's final performance on May 5 at Palms Presbyterian.

and makes the choir really enjoyable. Mims Cushing, a Recorder columnist and member since 2005, said her favorite part of the group is Schumann. "It is

very important to love your conductor," she said.

When the group began, there were only 10 or 12 members. Now there is an

audition and waiting list to be in Singers by the Sea, but anyone can try out. The

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Above: Pianist John Whitaker and conductor Becky Schumann
Left: Bud Bolenbaugh, Randy Leiby, and Howard Johnson

Photos by **Kelli McDaniel**/The Recorder

Singers by the Sea

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group is a senior choir, but it is nice to have young voices, Schumann said. She now has to cap the group at 60 because there are already venues where the group cannot perform due to their size.

Singers by the Sea have three seasons: spring, fall and Christmas. They take a short break after the concert in May and start singing again in July. The group meets once a week to practice at the Palms Presbyterian Church, who has generously donated practice space to the performers.

Cushing described the practices and being a part of the group as much fun as being a little kid again. The songs are meant to lift you up and it is like playing in the playground again, she said. If she has to miss practice it better be for a good reason, Cushing said.

The Singers by the Sea travel throughout the Jacksonville area to perform concerts at churches, retirement communities, hospitals and convalescent facilities. The group usually sings at 15-18 venues yearly, said Schumann. She coordinates and schedules the group's performances throughout the year, as well as selects the music being performed.

The group sings a wide range of music and is generally accompanied with classically trained pianist, John Whitaker. Schumann said when she started conducting the singers that she was not going to pick "just the oldies, but the goodies." She tries to put old and new material in the program so there is something for everyone.

Susan Bollenbaugh joined the group in 2005. It is something she looks forward to every Thursday morning. She said the song selection makes you want to sing and Schumann is very accepting

and supportive.

For each performance the group goes to the places throughout the community to perform on-site. The upcoming concert on May 5, is the only time the choir asks the community to come to them, Schumann said.

The theme of this year's final performance is Music Shines the Light. The concert is free to the public and will be held at 2:30 p.m. at Palms Presbyterian Church. A light reception will follow the Singers by the Sea Spring Concert.

Schumann said the Singers by the Sea are a very congenial group. It feels like a family, she said and it is just a great group of people to work with.

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