

“Mother Theresa, How Can I Help You?”
The Story of Elvera Voth, Robert Shaw,
and the Bethel College Benefit Sing-Along For Arts in Prison, Inc.

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Figure 1. Sing-Along with Robert Shaw, Bethel College, Newton, KS, 15 November 1998. This event, organized by his longtime friend and collaborator, Elvera Voth, was Shaw's final out of town engagement prior to his death. It was as well a remarkable public testimony to a passionate belief, shared by Voth and Shaw, that choral singing could be an instrument of social justice, healing and empowering the disenfranchised.

[View the Video Clip: Frank Dominguez introducing Robert Shaw, followed by Shaw's opening remarks.](#)

Abstract

For the last out of town engagement before his death, 82-year old Robert Shaw (1916-1999) traveled at his own expense in November 1998 to the small town of North Newton, Kansas. There he joined his longtime friend, 75-year old Elvera Voth (1923-), in a community sing-along to raise funds and awareness for a prison-based choir begun by Voth. Using interviews, correspondence, financial documents, and other primary source materials, this historical investigation chronicles both that event and the thirty-year friendship of Shaw and Voth. Through a shared passion for social justice and musical excellence, the duo of Voth and Shaw seemingly defied traditional aesthetic frameworks of music for music's sake, and chose, at the Newton event, to embody their strong beliefs that choral singing could be a vehicle to transform lives and prompt social change. The Benefit Sing-Along in Newton raised funds sufficient to launch a new non-profit organization, Arts in Prison, Inc. It also inspired efforts among those in attendance to launch other prison-based choral and arts endeavors with avowed purposes to assist and empower the disenfranchised.

In 1968 during the Thirteenth Annual Alaska Festival of Music, Elvera Voth (1923-) persuaded an unwilling Robert Shaw (1916-1999) to lead a sing-along at the Fort Richardson Army Base Chapel near Anchorage. Shaw assumed no one would attend. Yet Voth knew the Anchorage community would be there in sufficiently large numbers for this opportunity to sing with Maestro Shaw.

Voth, who moved to Alaska in 1961 without secure employment, acquired multiple choral conducting jobs in Anchorage, including conductor of the Anchorage Community Chorus, founder and conductor of the Anchorage Lyric Opera, conductor of the Anchorage Boys' Choir, and conductor of the Alaska Methodist University Chorale. She also prepared summer festival choruses for Shaw.¹

¹Voth was the only faculty member shared by two local universities, Helen Gillette, "Elvera Voth Likes Her Busy Life as Musicmaker," *Anchorage Daily Times*, 30 September 1968. Prior to moving to Alaska in 1961, Voth had applied to teach at many universities across the United States. Women were rarely considered for university positions during the early 1960s in the United States. After receiving a contract to

Driving Voth to the event, Shaw became agitated and drove very fast. He told Voth that he did not know what he would say, and then bellowed something to the effect, "I hope you will be pleased to see me fall on my face." How dare she suggest such a thing in the first place?

When they arrived at the hall, an over capacity crowd rose with a roar. Shaw greeted the audience graciously, spoke eloquently, and shared himself completely as he led the crowd in singing chorales from Bach's *St. John Passion*. On the way back into town he was already thinking ahead, wondering where else the sing-along format could be used as a complete program.²

"This [sing-along] was Elvera's idea," Shaw acknowledged, "because she . . . thought it might work. I wasn't particularly anxious to do it, but she seemed to think it was a good idea, and I'm glad she insisted, because I enjoyed it thoroughly."³ According to Voth, this initial sing-along format in Alaska was the humble precursor of what thirty years hence would stand as perhaps Shaw's greatest public testimony to his passionate beliefs about choral music and

teach at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks in 1960, the university called her and told her they received an application from a male and could not offer her the job. They said something to the effect, "I'm sure you will understand." Voth, interview by author, 20 October 2005, Lenexa, Kansas.

²Elvera Voth, Lenexa, Kansas to Keith Burris, Vernon, Connecticut, 11 May 2001, transcript in author's possession. There is another reference to this Alaskan sing-along in the program for Shaw's final Alaska Music Festival in 1973. It reads, "Some people will also remember the sunny Sunday afternoon in 1968 when Mr. Shaw led a 'sing-along' of chorales from Bach's 'St. John Passion' and talked gently, firmly, and convincingly about the language of music and the joys of a singing congregation." *Seventeenth Annual Alaska Music Festival Program*, June 17-23, 1973, original document in Voth's possession, copy in author's possession.

³ Laurel Pratt, "Conductor Robert Shaw on Church Music," *Anchorage Daily News*, 22 June 1968, 20. In the interview Shaw described the Anchorage Sing-Along, "I've never been in a situation where the Bach chorales seemed to work so perfectly. I've done the St. John Passion numbers of times, and taken it on the road, so—here was a congregation that really sang, because it was made up of church choir people and the Festival Chorus and so on, and substantially the whole congregation sang. There weren't very many people who'd come to observe, and if they had come to observe they got a piece of music and most of them were singing before the afternoon was over."

social justice: The 1998 Benefit Sing-Along at Bethel College.⁴ The Bethel Sing-Along raised both money and awareness for a prison-based choir begun by Voth. It also created opportunities for other arts experiences for incarcerated human beings, opportunities that continued to develop long past Shaw's death.

MENNONITES, MUSIC, AND ACTIVISM

Shaw contacted Voth, who had returned to Kansas for her retirement, after approximately twenty-five years without any correspondence, to inquire whether it was true she had organized a prison chorus. Voth, who had started a prison chorus at Lansing Correctional Facility in Lansing, Kansas, approximately two years prior to Shaw's telephone call, responded in the affirmative.

She also shared with Shaw her visions of a nonprofit organization, Arts in Prison, which would expand her prison choir program to include other arts-based experiences for inmates. Shaw expressed interest in helping her generate money. Together they devised a plan for an afternoon benefit sing-along. Eventually, 15 November 1998 was chosen as the date for this benefit to be held on the campus of Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas.

Bethel College was an ideal venue for such an occasion. Both pacifism and a deeply perceived call to serve humanity were embedded tenets at this Mennonite-sponsored college (enrollment: 518) and in the surrounding town of North Newton, Kansas (population: 1,574). This community had a strong history of embracing political activism, social justice, and pacifist causes. For example, during the Vietnam War, pairs of students took shifts ringing the campus bell twelve hours per day for four consecutive days. The bells rang a total of forty-thousand times to symbolize the number of US deaths in the Vietnam War.

During the 1990s, Bethel College students could study social justice issues through a unique Global Peace and Justice Major, a course in Nonviolent Theory and Practice, and a Poverty Seminar.⁵ Moreover, community

⁴Elvera Voth, Lenexa, Kansas to Keith Burris, Vernon, Connecticut, 11 May 2001, document in author's possession.

⁵*Bethel College Catalog* (North Newton, Kansas: Bethel College, 1997).

organizations such as the Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution and the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom were integral parts of the North Newton community.

In addition to his friendship with Elvera Voth, Robert Shaw naturally connected with the purposes of the Bethel Sing-Along through his great respect for the Mennonite Tradition and his view of arts experiences as a key to sustaining humanity. At the end of a Mennonite Festival Chorus dress rehearsal in Winnipeg, Canada, he said, "That was one of the most beautiful experiences of my life . . . You can buy the sound but you can't buy the love."⁶

Shaw also viewed arts experiences as crucial to human life: "They [the arts and human creativity] are not simply skills, their concern is the intellectual, ethical, and spiritual maturity of human life . . . the Arts are custodians of those values which most worthily define humanity . . . and . . . may prove to be the only workable Program of Conservation for the human race on the planet."⁷

Shaw pointed out the humor in how the term "humanities" implies that all other branches of human knowledge or endeavor must be considered among the "inhumanities." Indeed, Shaw believed the arts were far more important than institutionalized religion: "And I think somehow art is a greater sanity in the human species than religion...Art hasn't burned books, or started crusades, or started wars—and religion has."⁸

Shaw thought getting people involved in arts experiences, particularly musical performances,

⁶Wesley Berg, "Robert Shaw, Helmuth Rilling, and the Mennonite Festival Chorus," *Choral Journal* 32, no. 2 (September 1991): 45-46.

⁷Robert Shaw, "The Conservative Arts," 6, Emory University Commencement Address, Atlanta, Georgia, 12 June 1967, Robert Shaw Papers, Yale University Music Library, New Haven, Connecticut, MSS 86, Box 284, Folder 1440. Shaw gave this speech at least nine times between 1967 and 1998 according to Yale University's list of Shaw speeches. See *The Robert Shaw Reader*, ed. Robert Blocker (New Haven: Yale University, 2004), 352-364 for a version from 9 November 1981.

⁸Laurel Pratt, "Conductor Robert Shaw," 20. In Shaw's Emory University Commencement Address Shaw repeats this same concept, "Art has instituted no crusades, has burned neither witches nor books. Indeed, in this respect and perhaps because it has not been so institutionalized, great art, even more than established religion or political organization, has been the open hand of man reaching for his brother, and the persistent focus of his good will."

changed lives: "It is like a religious conversion only more lasting. They take it n [sic] their hearts and their heads."⁹ Moreover, Shaw avowed: "Music, like sex . . . is too important to be left to professionals."¹⁰

VOTH AND SHAW: SEPARATE PATHS, SIMILAR PASSIONS

Elvera Voth and Robert Shaw both pursued successful choral music careers. Shaw traveled world wide during his career. Voth's professional career, on the other hand, largely encompassed three states. She started in Kansas, ventured to South Dakota for four years, blossomed for thirty-five years in Alaska, and returned to Kansas for her so called "retirement." Though both traveled geographically different paths, they nonetheless shared various elements in background and disposition that likely contributed to their common passions about choral music-making and its value in society.

As a young girl on a Kansas farm, Voth daydreamed about owning a guitar and being a famous country-western singer. Instead of a guitar, Voth's father received a Bush and Lane upright piano as a barter exchange for livestock. She learned to play piano by ear and at age eight began playing at church. The hymns were in German. A song leader hummed the melody and Voth figured out what to play. She had perfect pitch and her elders from the Tabor Mennonite Church in Goessel, Kansas saw this talent as a gift from God not to be tainted. So, initially Voth was not allowed formal music lessons, although the elders gave in, and she formally studied piano at the end of her high school years. She played for weddings and funerals, playing one song seamlessly into the

next, but the open casket, immediately next to the piano at funerals, frightened her.¹¹

Unaccompanied singing, including lots of singing by groups of men, also occurred regularly in Elvera Voth's German Mennonite childhood. She recalled her inaccurate assumptions about the extent of male singing in the world: "I had to leave the Mennonite community before I realized men weren't automatically born tenors and basses. Everybody sang."¹² Even at home, Voth's father would occasionally sing German folk songs, such as *Do You Know How Many Stars Are in the Sky?* Voth was impressed with her dad's clear, beautiful voice.¹³

Group singing was a dominant part of Shaw's youth as well. Growing up, Shaw and his family sang together often. His father, The Reverend Shirley R. Shaw, his mother, and his four siblings sang at home, in church, at the doors of shut-ins, and while traveling in their car. They came to be known as the "Singing Shaws" during The Reverend Shirley Shaw's pastorates in California, including San Diego, Fresno, Santa Barbara, Eagle Rock, Red Bluff, Ontario, and Stockton. On the last day of school in junior high, Shaw led thirty-five classmates in song for a solid fifty minutes while his history teacher took care of urgent paperwork.¹⁴

Robert Shaw, of course, eventually began to pursue choral conducting in a more intentional manner. Following a 1937 visit by Fred Waring

⁹LaVelle Alexander, "Shaw: Great Music Must Appeal," *Anchorage Daily Times*, 14 June 1968, 14. Shaw illustrated how arts experiences are transformative: "It [art] is a true transubstantiation: pitch into sonata-form into spirit; paint onto canvas into tears; words onto paper across a proscenium into the heart of man," Shaw, "Conservative Arts," 9. For an in-depth profile of Shaw's character, see Michael R. Davis, "Conductors as Leaders: Essential Elements of Effective Leadership demonstrated by Robert Lawson Shaw," (D.A. diss., Ball State University, 2005).

¹⁰Scott Cantrell, "Voices Carry: Robert Shaw Changed the Course of Choral Singing," *The Kansas City Star*, 31 January 1999, J1, J4.

¹¹During her last two years in high school, Elvera was able to take professional piano lessons forty miles away from her home from Viola Harris, a teacher who was just out of college. Elvera described Harris as the "Harry Hill of Walton, Kansas." In the new school band Elvera played the mellophone (an inexpensive version of a French horn). During Harris's second year the school bought uniforms and they started a marching band. There was a state piano contest at Emporia State University and her dad was not going to let Elvera's brother, Arnold drive her to Emporia because there was work that needed to be done on the farm. Her mom talked him into letting Arnold drive her there. Immediately after playing, she went back to Walton. The next day at school she found out during band rehearsal that she received a Highly Superior Rating at State. Elvera Voth, interview by author, 5 August 2005, Lenexa, Kansas.

¹²Chris Shull, "Helping Music Find Lost Souls: Robert Shaw will Conduct a Classical Sing-Along at Bethel College in Support of Elvera Voth's Arts in Prison Program," *The Wichita Eagle*, 13 November 1998.

¹³Elvera Voth, interview by author, 18 July 2005, Lenexa, Kansas.

¹⁴Joseph A. Mussulman, *Dear People* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979), 8–10.

to Pomona College, where Shaw was directing a glee club, Waring inquired whether Shaw might be interested in working for him. Shaw initially dismissed the opportunity because he had decided to pursue the ministry. The following year, however, he started working for Waring; he reportedly needed the money.¹⁵

Voth, by that time a choir director in her own right, listened devotedly to the Fred Waring Hour, a weekly radio show filled with choral performances prepared by Shaw. Her first Shaw recording was Benjamin Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*, which she purchased while she was teaching at Freeman Junior College in South Dakota. At this point in her career, she was convinced choral conducting would be her life and she felt confident in her musical knowledge.

Voth realized she still had a great deal to learn, however, when in 1955 she attended the San Diego Workshop on Choral Art headed and taught by Shaw. One of her colleagues at the San Diego Workshop was Mary Hale, conductor of the Community Chorus in Anchorage at the time.¹⁶

Hale decided the Alaskan community needed a similar musical event to occur there in the summers. She had no problem convincing Shaw and his musical friends to travel to Alaska, but they were skeptical about community support. After Hale sent news clippings reflecting local excitement for the potential music festival, Shaw and his friends decided to teach,

¹⁵Mussulman, *Dear People*, 3–19. For more information on Fred Waring, see Virginia Waring, *Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1997).

¹⁶Hale's friends teasingly called her Hale Mary. Elvera Voth, interview by author, 2 August 2005, Lenexa, Kansas. Voth's and Hale's names were listed in, "A Synopsis of Courses in Analysis (Volume III)," Workshop in Choral Art, San Diego State College, summer, 1955, 6, 7. Original in Harold Decker Papers, ACDA archives, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Shaw stipulated that he would establish an educational program when he accepted the role as conductor of the San Diego Symphony in 1953. The Workshop in Choral Art was an eight week class taught by Shaw, Julius Herford, contralto Florence Kopleff, baritone Benjamin De Loache, accompanist and assistant conductor John Wustman, manager Tom Pyle, Alice Parker (who joined in 1954 and married Pyle that same year at the Shaw's summer home), and administrative assistant Clayton Krehbiel. Mussulman, *Dear People*, 119–131. Voth attended the Fourth Annual Workshop in Choral Art from 9 July– 17 August 1955 and the 1956 summer session also. Voth drove from Kansas to San Diego alone for the first workshop. She had to stop in the Colorado Mountains to allow her automobile to cool down. Elvera Voth, interview by author, 2 August 2005, Lenexa, Kansas.

for reimbursement of expenses only, at the first Alaska Festival of Music in 1956.¹⁷

Hale realized there was a need for someone with more experience in choral conducting to prepare choruses for Shaw. She persuaded Voth to relocate to Alaska and take on this task. Voth moved to Alaska in 1962 and from then until 1973 she prepared choruses for Robert Shaw for the "Music to Match Our Mountains" Alaska Music Festival.¹⁸

"The Wonder Years," 1962-1973

Three months before the 1998 Bethel Benefit Sing-Along, Voth sent Shaw a letter thanking him for his work with the upcoming event. In the letter she described their time in Alaska affectionately as "the wonder years:" "I

¹⁷Hale was so convinced that Shaw would come to Anchorage for the festival, she had Shaw step on a piece of paper so she could measure his feet for a pair of mukluks (Eskimo boots). Voth, interview by author, 20 October 2005, Lenexa, Kansas. Instead of receiving monetary fees, local businesses treated the musical guests magnificently. Various automotive dealers supplied the guest artists with cars, the Anchorage Garden Club decorated their hotel rooms with flower arrangements, cub scouts distributed brochures, sight-seeing and salmon fishing trips occurred as time permitted, and informal parties happened nightly. It was a huge community affair with over one thousand people helping with ushering, parking, and selling tickets. Local businessmen donated over fifteen thousand dollars. Shaw was impressed with the community involvement, *Musical America: All that is Significant in the Musical Arts*, August 1962, 10–14, 36–37. Construction workers, fishermen, trappers, and Matanuska Valley homesteaders came to the event. The city experienced the worst traffic jams in its history. Local police were amazed that an arts event caused this type of ruckus. Mussulman. *Dear People*, 130. Also, KTVA televised Julius Herford's lectures for the layman and score study sessions to prepare the Festival listeners for the fullest enjoyment of Festival music.

¹⁸"The basic purpose of the Festival was to enrich musicians and audiences with the experience of great music studied, rehearsed, and finally performed under the direction of capable professionals." *Twenty-third Annual Music to Match Our Mountains Alaska Festival of Music Program*, June 1978, original document in Voth's possession, copy in author's possession. When Voth first arrived in Alaska, she did not have employment. In addition to preparing choruses for Shaw, Voth found work as assistant professor of music at Community College, which is affiliated with the University of Alaska. She was also subcontracted to Alaska Methodist University where she directed AMU Chorale (only faculty member shared by two local colleges). At the Community College she was conductor of Anchorage Community Chorus and the Anchorage Community College Lyric Opera Theater. She also founded the Anchorage Boys' Choir and the Alaska Chamber Singers.

am sending a 1968 interview published in the Anchorage Times in 1968 in which you tell about that first Sing-Along at the Fort Richardson Army Base Chapel. I was pleased to find this article in an untitled box of Alaskana. It is a nice reminder of what were, in my life, the Wonder Years."¹⁹

Robert Shaw served as artistic director of the Alaska Festival of Music from its beginning in 1956 through 1973. Shaw conducted twelve of these festivals and he brought with him guest artists who believed in his work and enjoyed the long summer days in Alaska. These musicians collaborated with local amateur musicians during rehearsals. They told the Alaskans that they were "just the best. We believed them and were better for it."²⁰

Festival organizers prepared social outings for the visiting musicians. For example, prior to the 1966 festival, a letter requested locals to suggest activities for the "day off," Saturday, June 18 such as fishing ("can you supply gear?"), plane rides, hikes, cabins, a day spent at Eklutna. The letter also asked local citizens to "please consider entertaining these people in your homes, after rehearsals, during any spare time that you both have."²¹

Between 1962 and 1973, Voth prepared choruses for the Festival. When asked if she resented giving her baton over to the guest musicians she responded, "Why should I? It's the greatest learning situation you can imagine. I don't even have to go out to school, these big men come here." Her schedule included morning score study; afternoon consultations, committee meetings, and appointments; and evening rehearsals with one group or another. She worked six days a week. A local reporter noted at the time that "Music . . . is even more important to her than a country home and the great outdoors."²²

¹⁹Elvera Voth, Lenexa, Kansas to Robert Shaw, Atlanta, Georgia, 3 August 1998, Robert Shaw Papers, Yale University Music Library, New Haven, Connecticut, MSS 86, Box 262, Folder 856, 025.

²⁰Elvera Voth, Lenexa, Kansas to Keith Burris, Vernon, Connecticut, 11 May 2001.

²¹Alaska Festival of Music, Festival Notes, 30 May 1966, document in Voth's possession. Voth participated in these outings as well. "We almost lost Elvera on the canoe trip—she can't swim. You'd think with those long arms . . ." Jane Stewart, Anchorage, Alaska to Robert Shaw, Summer Music School of Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan, 16 July 1965, Robert Shaw Papers, Box 208, Folder 150, Yale University Music Library, New Haven, Connecticut.

²²Helen Gillette, "Elvera Voth Likes Her Busy Life as Musicmaker," *Anchorage Daily Times*, 30 September 1968;

Robert Shaw once remarked that the Anchorage community chorus was the best of its kind in the country.²³ Voth treasured her musical experiences from the Festival, "Preparing many of the choral masterpieces for Mr. Shaw was the great privilege of my life. What good but terrifying memories I have, turning over to him the choruses from Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, Bach's *B Minor Mass*, Britten's *War Requiem*, Verdi's *Requiem* and others. . . . The chorus was entirely my responsibility."²⁴ Other masterworks she prepared for Shaw included Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* (1967) and Honegger's *King David* (1968).²⁵ [Figure 2 pictures Voth and Shaw at the 1967 Festival].



Figure 2. From left to right: Elvera Voth, Robert Shaw, and Frank Pinkerton at the 1967 Alaska Festival of Music. From the Robert Shaw Papers, Box 201, Folder 151 (program book for the 12th Annual Festival of Music), Yale University Music Library.

See <<http://www.festivalmusic.org/history.htm>>, accessed 15 October 2005 for more information on the Alaska Music Festival, now called the Anchorage Music Festival.

²³ Molly B. Jones, "Musings," *Anchorage Daily News*, 29 July 1973, 3.

²⁴Gillette, "Elvera Voth."

²⁵*Eighth Annual Alaska Festival of Music Program*, June 12–27, 1963, original document in Voth's possession, copy in author's possession; *Twelfth Annual Festival of Music Program*, June 11–23, 1967, original document in Voth's possession, copy in author's possession; "King David' Climaxes '68 Festival," *Anchorage Daily Times*, 21 June 1968.

Mutual Respect and Admiration

Through twelve seasons together at the Alaska Festival of Music, Shaw and Voth developed a deep and mutually respectful relationship. "I've met a few great people in my life, Eleanor Roosevelt among them, and Elvera is on the half-dozen great people I've ever met," said Shaw. "She is absolutely honest and completely unselfish. If she thinks she is doing some good then I believe her," he continued, "because she has had more experience in doing good than anybody else I know."²⁶

Voth spoke about how she viewed Shaw as a great person and described her respect for his philanthropic actions. "He [Shaw] is the hero of my life. . . . He is a meticulous musician and certainly, to my mind both the most profound human being I have met in my lifetime and the wittiest."²⁷ "Robert Shaw, to my mind, is a great humanitarian first, and the world's great choral conductor second."²⁸

Both Shaw and Voth, moreover, believed in the deep value of choral singing and how it could transform people positively. Shaw reasoned, "You can make something that's more beautiful together than you can by yourself."²⁹ Voth commented that the arts in general "help us to create our best selves...that I have come to believe more and more."³⁰ Voth decided that during her retirement she would bring arts experiences to a "starving" segment of society for whom she felt deep empathy –the incarcerated population.

Voth's Retirement: Teaching Inmates to Sing?

During her retirement, Voth knew she wanted to do some type of volunteer work. Her friends asked her if she was going to work with

choirs. She answered by saying that she was "tired of providing dinner music for people who are not very hungry."³¹

On 6 August 1995, Elvera directed a men's chorus during the centennial anniversary morning worship service at Eden Mennonite Church in rural McPherson County, Kansas. After the service she visited with Janeal Krehbiel, a friend and former student. Krehbiel noted, "We were visiting and she told me she had sort of 'done it all' and now wanted to give back something in the way of music. She told me about her dream about helping prisoners learn to sing and I immediately went out to find Roger [Krehbiel] . . . and he put her in touch with the right people."³² Roger Krehbiel was the Deputy Warden at the Topeka Correctional Facility in Topeka, Kansas. He contacted Warden David McKune of Lansing Correctional Facility and provided him a description of what Voth had done prior to retirement. Roger Krehbiel called Elvera, suggested she set up a meeting with McKune, and the East Hill Singers began in the fall of 1995.³³

Voth named the choir the East Hill Singers, because the Minimum Security Unit sits on the east hill of the correctional facility. At the first rehearsal, in October of 1995, approximately thirty inmates appeared in response to a poster that announced the formation of a singing group. Most apparently thought they were joining a rap group. However, classical choral literature has always been a foundation of Elvera's programming. Accordingly, half of these men left during the rehearsal break.³⁴

²⁶Robert Shaw quoted in Chris Shull, "Helping Music Find Lost Souls: Robert Shaw will Conduct a Classical Sing-Along at Bethel College in Support of Elvera Voth's Arts in Prison Program," *The Wichita Eagle*, 13 November 1998.

²⁷Karen Martinez, "Robert Shaw Sing-Along is November 15 at Bethel," *The Hutchinson News*, 6 November 1998.

²⁸Chris Strunk, "Bethel Graduate's Career Revived with Prison Choir," *Newton Kansan*, 29 October, 1998.

²⁹Laurie L. Oswald, "Sing-Along at Bethel Will Benefit Prison Arts Project," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, 5 November 1998, 2.

³⁰Rhonda Holman, "The Choral Master: Shaw Still Bows to the Music," *The Wichita Eagle*, 16 February 1992, F1.

³¹Elvera Voth, *Plains People: Elvera Voth*, Sunflower Journeys Public Television Documentary, prod. Amanda Shaw and Scott Williams, ex. prod. Dave Kendall, 10 min., KTWU/Channel 11, Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas, 2005, source tape A2368. Although in one sense she had grown tired of working as a choral conductor and establishing programs, in another sense being a choral conductor was a strong part of her identity that she did not want to let go. In addition to her identity as choral conductor, her Mennonite background ingrained a sense of social service, a need to reach out to the helpless. Another factor for her interest in prisoners is her strong feelings against capital punishment. Elvera Voth, Lenexa, Kansas, telephone interview with author, Lenexa, Kansas, 31 October 2005.

³²Roger Krehbiel was married to Janeal's husband's cousin. These people also attended this anniversary celebration, Janeal Krehbiel, Lawrence, Kansas to author, Lenexa, Kansas, 13 October 2005.

³³Roger Krehbiel, Topeka, Kansas to author, Lenexa, Kansas, 26 October 2005.

³⁴"Kansas Has Chorus Instead of Chain Gang," *The Mennonite*, 9 July 1996, 14. Selections from the first East Hill

Even though Voth worked with choruses throughout her professional life, she says she discovered the best phase of her career at retirement: "It's a shock when you retire. But this project saved me. I was a little worn out with choral music. But you see the light in these guys' eyes, and you remember what it's all about."³⁵ As founder and director of the East Hill Singers, Voth flourished in the simple joy of making music and in introducing music she loved to a group never before exposed to formal choral singing. "I don't know how I could be so lucky. . . . I'm now seventy-five years old, and at seventy years I found the most interesting work of my life. I have the freedom to do what I want to do, and what I want to do is work with inmates."³⁶

In that initial season, only ten minimum security inmates were eligible to perform in the first public concert according to the rules and policies established by the prison. She knew such a relatively small group of Lansing men needed vocal support in order to perform in a choral concert that matched her musical intentions. She invited men from the Rainbow Mennonite Church to travel with her to Lansing and rehearse in the prison. In addition to these volunteer singers, she asked some men from the Lyric Opera of Kansas City to perform in the concert. The Correctional Facility allowed the eligible Lansing men to leave its walls to join the volunteer singers for the public concert.³⁷

In describing the concert, Voth said, "In this chorus we have African-Americans, two American Indians, a Hispanic, and old White guys. . . . Where else would I ever get to work

Singers concert include: Britten's *Hodie Christus Natus Est*, Schubert's *Holy, Holy, Holy*, Cherubini's *Veni Jesu*, Mendelssohn's *If With All Your Hearts Then Shall the Righteous Shine*, Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*, and Handel's *O Had I Jubal's Lyre. I Dream of a World, East Hill Singer's Concert Program*, 2 June 1996, Rainbow Mennonite Church, Kansas City, Kansas, copy of document in author's possession.

³⁵Scott Cantrell, "That's the Sound of Men, Working on the Chorale: A Teacher Comes Back from Alaska and Raises Gentle Voices from a Kansas Prison Chorus," *The Kansas City Star*, 7 June 1997, E1.

³⁶Chris Shull, "Helping Music Find Lost Souls: Robert Shaw will Conduct a Classical Sing-Along at Bethel College in Support of Elvera Voth's Arts in Prison Program," *The Wichita Eagle*, 13 November 1998.

³⁷The first East Hill Singers concert was "I Dream of a World" at 3:00 PM on 2 June 1996 at Rainbow Mennonite Church. The money raised benefited Crosslines. Crosslines provides emergency food, shelter, and clothing to those in need. *I Dream of a World East Hill Singers Concert Program*.

with that group of people? And then when we add the Kansas City people (volunteers), we add CEOs, we add doctors, we have opera singers, truck drivers, you name it. You can't see another picture like that anywhere."³⁸

Voth also reflected on how the inmates' singing created "a communal bond that many have never before experienced, a chance to work toward and experience the rewards of reaching a long-term goal with each other."³⁹ One of her former inmate singers shared how singing in the choir helped bridge racial gaps inherent in prison life. "It's helping me as a person. I'm singing with a bunch of different guys. When I'm singing around these fellows, I don't look at race. We're one."⁴⁰ She said, "Working in the prison has prompted me to question the meaning of loving my neighbor, of being part of a faith community whose highest calling is to minister to the disenfranchised, the forgotten, the undervalued."⁴¹

Because the East Hill Singers performed in the public, these concerts, according to one Mennonite pastor, helped audience members to see inmate choristers as individuals. "For perhaps the first time, the audience was confronted by a group of male prisoners who challenged our stereotypes about them. Here were men singing powerfully about spiritual realities who, regardless of their failures, were undeniably human along with the rest of us."⁴²

MOTHER THERESA, HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

After Shaw's final visit to the Alaska Music Festival in 1973, Shaw and Voth had not talked for approximately twenty-five years. In late 1997 when Shaw telephoned Voth, who was living in Kansas, she was astonished and pleased. During the phone call Shaw told Elvera that he heard she was leading a prison choir. He said,

³⁸Jeffrey Ramsey, "Prisoners Escape with Song," *The Pitch*, 27 January–2 February 2000.

³⁹Elvera Voth and Christopher Kurtz, "Arts in Prison," *The Mennonite*, 8 May 2001, 4.

⁴⁰"Chorus Gives Hope, Song to Prisoners: Volunteer Conductor Works with Lansing Inmates to Bring Music Into Their Lives," *The Wichita Eagle*, 20 December 1999.

⁴¹"Chorus Gives Hope," 5.

⁴²Frank Ward, pastor of the Rainbow Mennonite Church, Inside of Shaw Sing-Along Program, 15 November 1998, see Appendix 2; Ann W. Waters, "Conducting a Prison Chorus: An Interview with Elvera Voth," *Choral Journal* 38, no. 1 (August 1997): 17–21.

“Is that true?” She replied, “Yes indeed.” There was a long pause, and then Shaw responded, “Well, Mother Theresa, how can I help you?”⁴³

Because Shaw is deceased, it remains unclear as to exactly how Shaw found out that Elvera was working with prison choirs in Lansing. One likely possibility was the letter Shaw received from Ann Waters, a friend and colleague of Voth’s. Waters attended the East Hill Singers’ “All Things Bright and Beautiful” performance on 8 June 1997 and sent Shaw a copy of the program with her notes scribbled on it. In an accompanying letter, she described how Shaw would have loved the concert. She described the inmate narrations, which allowed the audience to be drawn in; the interaction between inmates and their families, and that Shaw should attend a concert.⁴⁴

Shortly after receiving Water’s letter in 1997, Shaw directed Haydn’s *Creation* at Boston University. Claudia Frost, a friend and former student of Voth’s, approached Shaw at a break in the rehearsal. She introduced herself to Shaw as Voth’s friend. Shaw put both of his hands on Frost’s shoulder, and with a big grin said, “Have you heard what that dear woman is doing?” Then Shaw told Frost about Voth’s prison choir. Shaw was clearly very elated about Voth’s work with inmates.⁴⁵

⁴³Elvera Voth, interview by author, 18 July 2005, Lenexa, Kansas.

⁴⁴Ann Waters, Kent, Ohio to Robert Shaw, Atlanta, Georgia, 11 June 1997, Robert Shaw Papers, Yale University Music Library, New Haven, Connecticut, MSS 86, Box 262, Folder 856, 001 and 002. Waters taught high school choral music in Anchorage when Elvera arrived in 1961. She was the assistant for the Anchorage Community Chorus. Waters became Peter Hereford’s assistant at Westminster Choir College. Ann’s letter reads, “I’m sorry you weren’t there. You would have loved it. E [Elvera] wrote narrations for all the numbers, most of which she read but some were read by an inmate. It was a very effective way to draw the audience in, and they were with the chorus 100%. It was quite moving. All solos were sung by inmates.

“After the concert the inmates’ families came up to greet them and I can’t even describe that. Then we all had potluck in Fellowship Hall. The Mennonites and Methodist women’s fellowship had competitive fire in their eyes so the inmates had a wonderful dinner with their families—kids, grandparents, girlfriends, various kith and kin probably some of the sweetest food they will ever eat.

“So next year, if E can hang on that long—it’s indeed hard work! —You must come and we can arrange it for someone to pick you up @ the airport.” Ann could not guarantee that Shaw heard about Elvera’s work with inmates solely from her letter, Ann Waters, Kent, Ohio, telephone interview with author, Lenexa, Kansas 29 September 2005.

⁴⁵Claudia Frost, Boston, Massachusetts, telephone interview with author, Lenexa, Kansas, 14 June 2005. Claudia Frost was Voth’s first graduate student at the

University of Alaska. She studied choral conducting and English literature from 1976 to 1980.

Shaw’s Humanitarian Interests

The Bethel Sing-Along was Robert Shaw’s final out of town engagement before his death.⁴⁶ Voth said, “It is awesome to see this event mixed in with his engagements with major orchestras in the country. . . . He truly is a great humanitarian. Anything that is of use to society is of interest to him.”⁴⁷

Shaw’s humanitarian and philanthropic ideals, of course, has been visible throughout his life’s work, particularly in his programming. In the 1980s, for example, Shaw performed before the public in more than three hundred musical events in various areas of Georgia, including “several free concerts at Piedmont Park and Stone Mountain Memorial Park, free concerts for Special Audiences (senior citizens, handicapped, prison inmates, hospital patients).”⁴⁸

University of Alaska. She studied choral conducting and English literature from 1976 to 1980.

⁴⁶Robert Shaw died on 25 January 1999. “Robert Shaw, April 30, 1916-January 25, 1999 (obituary),” *Choral Journal* 39, no. 3 (March, 1999): 32-33; Chris Strunk, “He Touched Their Lives: Bethel Students Remember ‘Leader of the Choral World’ Shaw, Who Died Monday,” *Newton Kansan*, 26 January 1999, 1, 5. Shaw had another out of town engagement in St. Louis in December of 1999 that he cancelled due to back pain. Richard Boursy, New Haven, Connecticut, to author, Lenexa, Kansas 15 July 2005.

⁴⁷“Shaw Comes to Kansas!” *The Kansas American Choral Directors Association Newsletter* 19, no. 3, November 1998, 1.

⁴⁸Earlene Decker Brasher, “The Contributions of Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra to the Educational and Cultural Climate of Atlanta,” (Ph. D. diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 1988), 266-267. For more information on Shaw’s foreign tours, see Robert Dean, “The Foreign Tours of the Robert Shaw Chorale,” (Ph. D. diss., The Florida State University, 2000); for information on the influence of the Robert Shaw Chorale on the broader phenomenon of professional choir activity in the United States, see Phillip Jeffery Morrow, “The Influence of the Robert Shaw Chorale, the Roger Wagner Chorale and the Gregg Smith Singers on the Professional Chorus in the United States,” (D.M.A. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993).

Shaw had also marketed his Collegiate Chorale in terms of inclusiveness, as “a melting pot that sings.”⁴⁹

During World War II Shaw witnessed the healing effects of choral singing:

I've been asked if I have had any experience in working in prisons and the answer is no. But I did work with choirs immediately following World War II, and men who had flown fifty missions over Europe or fifty missions over Tokyo. My brother was a chaplain in the Air force . . . There were scores and scores who said this music has saved my life and found their way back to sanity and for a while they could forget their killing.⁵⁰

Similarly, Shaw believed the Arts in Prison program could help with inmate rehabilitation by offering a healing experience for the incarcerated. At the Bethel Sing-Along he commented, “You are engaged in the creation of something which is healthy and beautiful and wholesome . . . I think it is enormously productive towards health and healing in a very difficult situation.”⁵¹

THE BENEFIT SING-ALONG: A ONCE IN A LIFETIME MUSICAL GATHERING

The Benefit Sing-Along with Robert Shaw was a unique event for all involved. Doug Penner began the event by proclaiming, “As president of Bethel college, it is a special honor, a special treat to be able to welcome you all to this unique and wonderful, and I think only what can be called a once in a lifetime musical gathering.”⁵²

Voth's Mennonite background and her past associations with Bethel College factored into the location of the Benefit Sing-Along.⁵³ Shaw

loved the singing Mennonites and the singing Mennonites loved both Shaw and Voth. At the rehearsal for the Sing-Along, Shaw asked the musicians how many of them had a Mennonite background. He said he was just trying to figure the chances of success.⁵⁴

The first words Shaw spoke during the Sing-Along were:

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. It has been my pleasure to be here in Newton, Kansas these past forty-eight hours, and I have learned two things. The first is that everyone in this room is in love with Elvera Voth. And the second thing is that if any of us are going to have a chance of any life after this one, we better darn well listen to what she tells us to do.⁵⁵



Figure 3. Elvera Voth at the Bethel College Benefit Sing-Along. “We better darn well listen to what she tells us to do,” quipped Robert Shaw.

and in church and religion. On 16 January 1956 she received a humorous telegram from two male admirers, “Paul Revere was the man of the hour. Alvera [sic] Voth is the woman of the year. Some like to see Paul's statue in their city. We would rather see Alvera's [sic] bust in ours. Congratulations. Jimmy and Reuben (“Jimmy” is a nick name for Florence, Mrs. Reuben Goertz, Reuben's spouse), Freeman, South Dakota to Elvera Voth, Newton, Kansas, telegram in Voth's possession.

⁴⁹Robert Shaw, *The Robert Shaw Reader*, 405.

⁵⁰Robert Shaw, Robert Shaw Papers, Yale University Music Library, New Haven, Connecticut, MSS 86, Box 262, Folder 856, 081; Robert Shaw, transcription of the Benefit Sing-Along.

⁵¹Chris Shull, “Helping Music.”

⁵²Transcription of the Benefit Sing-Along

⁵³Voth spent her senior year at Bethel College in Newton, Kansas, where she completed her bachelors of Music Education degree in 1946. She taught at Bethel College four for years and Newton High School for four years. In 1956 Voth was awarded Newton's Woman of the Year in recognition her dedication in fields of business and professional service, education, community and civic service

⁵⁴Robert Shaw, Robert Shaw Papers, Yale University Music Library, New Haven, Connecticut, MSS 86, Box 262, Folder 856, 073.

⁵⁵Robert Shaw, Robert Shaw Papers, Yale University Music Library, New Haven, Connecticut, MSS 86, Box 262, Folder 856, 081. The Shaw papers at Yale have Shaw's handwritten notes for the Sing-Along. To verify the accuracy of these notes, these quotes were taken from an audio recording of the Sing-Along. The audio recording is in the owner's possession. For more information on Shaw and the Mennonites, see Wesley Berg, “Robert Shaw, Helmuth Rilling, and the Mennonite Festival Chorus,” *Choral Journal* 32, no. 2 (September 1991): 43–48.

Shaw joked with the Mennonites during two introductions at the Sing-Along. "You'll notice, because you will be part of our choir, that *Old Hundredth*, which is the first number we will sing, is written in half notes and whole notes," he began. "This was obviously copied from an Episcopalian Hymnal. The Mennonite hymnal has only quarter notes and half notes. It was done to save ink," quipped Shaw, "which means that either all Mennonites can sing faster than Episcopalians or that Mennonites are richer than all Episcopalians."⁵⁶

Shaw also poked fun at the well-developed congregational singing in the Mennonite tradition. He said, "I have been given to understand that Mennonite children learn this hymn [*Holy God We Praise Thy Name*] in four part harmony some three or four months prior to birth."⁵⁷

He went on to compare his own religious background with the Mennonites, "In a somewhat weaker evangelical tradition my father and grandfather used to lead their congregations in this obvious stolen melody to a grossly inferior text. I want to thank everybody here for setting me straight," he continued, "and I will speak to my forefathers if I ever get there, it can't be very much longer."⁵⁸

Planners for the event were concerned whether Shaw's health would allow him to travel to Newton, Kansas and lead the Sing-Along. He had cancelled previous engagements prior to the Sing-Along and the Sing-Along Task Force

did not want the community to be disappointed. They even considered purchasing cancellation insurance.⁵⁹

Because of the overwhelming response to the project, the Sing-Along Task Force decided to include the option of attending a choral rehearsal from 1:00-3:00 PM for an extra fee.⁶⁰ One thousand two hundred and seventy-five people attended the Sing-Along. Fifteen regional choruses combined to form the mass chorus of four hundred fifty voices.⁶¹

⁵⁹Elvera Voth, Lenexa, Kansas to Nola Frink, Atlanta, Georgia, 19 September 1998, Robert Shaw Papers, Yale University Music Library, New Haven, Connecticut, MSS 86, Box 262, Folder 856, 040, "Nola, on a more sensitive subject, should we consider a cancellation insurance policy for this event? I've done a little checking and got some pretty awful guidelines: 1) Is the person to be insured suffering from any physical, psychological, or other medical conditions? If yes, give full details. 2) Is he undergoing any form of medical or other treatment? If yes, give full details. 3) Is he following any prescribed medical regime? If yes, give full details. I ask this with all due respect and trust you understand my concern. By the way, if you Atlanta folks need medical assistance in adapting to the rigors of life in Kansas, my niece is the emergency room supervisor at the Newton Medical Center and will be on stand-by for your comfort." Voth had good reason to be concerned because in 1992 Shaw canceled his commitment to conduct the Brahms *Requiem* at the Alaska Music Festival, Nola Frink, Atlanta, Georgia to Voth, Anchorage, Alaska, 31 March 1992, letter in author's possession. A second concern was whether the floor of the gymnasium would withstand the weight of all the participants and the bleachers. A special engineer concluded that the structure was safe. Elvera Voth, interview with author, 2 August 2005.

⁶⁰Elvera Voth, Lenexa, Kansas to Nola Frink, Atlanta, Georgia, 7 April 1998, Robert Shaw Papers, Yale University Music Library, New Haven, Connecticut, MSS 86, Box 262, Folder 856, 012, "Because there is, of course, an overwhelming response to the project, we would like to accommodate as many as possible. Question: may a limited group of folks be allowed to attend the choral rehearsal prior to the concert? (yes [hand written to the left of this question]). Since this is a benefit concert, we would like sell these seats as well as the concert seats."

⁶¹The following choruses participated (not all directors attended): Bethel College, Dr. Marles Preheim; East Hill Singers, Elvera Voth; Friends University, Dr. Cecil Riney; Hesston College, Dr. Jacob Rittenhouse; Kansas City Opera Chorus, Elvera Voth; Kansas City Chorale, Charles Bruffy; Newton Chorale, Dr. Walter Jost; Rainbow Mennonite Church, Dr. Roseann Penner Kaufman; Tabor College, Brad Vogel; Trinity United Methodist Church (Kansas City), Michael Phillips; Truman State University (Kirksville, MO), Dr. Tim Woods; University of Missouri at Kansas City, Dr. Eph Ehly; Village Presbyterian Church, William O. Baker; Wichita Chamber Chorale, Dr. Michael Pohlenz; Wichita State University, Dr. Harrison Boughton and Dr. Robert Glasmann. *Sing-Along with Robert Shaw Program* 15 November 2005, back cover, document in author's possession.

⁵⁶Robert Shaw, Robert Shaw Papers, Yale University Music Library, New Haven, Connecticut, MSS 86, Box 262, Folder 856, 082. Shaw continued by sharing some history about this hymn, "The *Hundredth Psalm* happens to be between two thousand five hundred and three thousand years old and the *Hundredth* hymn which is a poetic realization of the text is almost five hundred years old. In a part of France which is the southwest corner of France for a while we had a school for American conductors. It is a large dry area and suitable for raising sheep rather than raising cattle. On the sites of where thirty-five thousand years ago, man's ancestors worshipped water because it was so scarce are now built in the 12th and 13th century are built Roman Catholic Chancels and small churches. Now when you go into the church you dip your hand into what is called Holy Water. Holy only 12th or 13th century, think about it for a moment, we are privileged to sing these extraordinary, extraordinary things which come from earliest man on into our own lives with the immediacy of tomorrow."

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸Robert Shaw, Robert Shaw Papers, Yale University Music Library, New Haven, Connecticut, MSS 86, Box 262, Folder 856, 097. Shaw was referring to the hymn, *Holy God We Praise Thy Name*.

Instrumentalists from six Kansas orchestras performed in the fifty member orchestra.⁶² The Bethel Choral Department, headed by Dr. Marles Preheim, participated and was instrumental in preparing for the event.⁶³

Shaw donated not only his time, but also his and all the Atlanta guests' travel expenses. Originally the Sing-Along Task Force planned on taking these fees from the net admission receipts.⁶⁴ Shaw's generosity contributed to a final profit of over twenty-five thousand dollars.⁶⁵

Former inmate singer, Frank Dominguez (Figure 4), developed hope, inspiration, and confidence through his experiences with the East Hill Singers. His experience of choral singing as a means for healing became embodied in his introduction of Robert Shaw at the Sing-Along:

Six months ago I was 34036 singing in this Lansing choir. And today I am Frank Dominguez singing with some of the finest voices around accompanied by my wife and my five children . . . Through the furthering of this project, many men will benefit and what better way to help men reenter society rehabilitated then to allow them to participate in a program that aids in the

building of high self esteem, confidence and a hope that may carry men through the rest of their lives as productive citizens in our society.⁶⁶

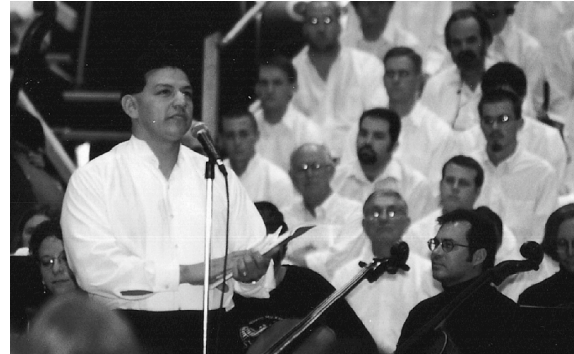


Figure 4. Frank Dominguez speaks at the Bethel College Benefit Sing-Along

Shaw's mannerisms during the Sing-Along contrasted drastically from some earlier rehearsal behavior in his career. Shaw was known to tyrannize and alternately praise his choristers during rehearsal.⁶⁷ During the Benefit Sing-Along, every gesture and every word counted for something. Voth's perception was, "He had to let go of things that might have tortured him or angered him in the past . . . It seemed a full victory of the angelic forces over the demons inside him that fought for his very soul for so much of his life."⁶⁸

Shaw sincerely wanted the people to participate in a rich, meaningful, music making experience. After introducing the first selection, *Old Hundredth*, and before singing it, he asked the participants to stretch and meet those people standing in front and back of them:

⁶⁶Frank Dominguez, transcription of the Benefit Sing-Along.

⁶⁷In a "Dear People" letter, Shaw chastised his choristers as they were preparing for Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, "Our tenors are adolescent. Our altos have not passed puberty. Our sopranos trip their dainty ballet of coloratura decorum, and our basses woof their wittle away woofs all the way home . . . Get your backs and bellies into it! You can't sing Beethoven from the neck up--you'll bleed! Beethoven is not precious. He's prodigal as hell. He tramples all over nicety. He's ugly, heroic; he roars, he lusts after beauty, he rages after nobility. Be ye not temperate!" Wendell Brock, "Robert Shaw Dead at 82: Conductor Most Important Figure in Atlanta Cultural History," *The Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution*, 25 January 1999, A1.

⁶⁸Elvera Voth, Lenexa, Kansas to Keith Burris, Vernon, Connecticut, transcript in author's possession, 11 June 2001.

⁶²The instrumentalists were from the following orchestras: Fort Hays State University Symphony Orchestra, Friends University Symphony Orchestra, Hutchinson Symphony Orchestra, Kansas City Civic Symphony Orchestra, Newton Mid-Kansas Symphony Orchestra, and Topeka Symphony Orchestra. The pianist was Dr. Karen Schlabaugh and the organist was Dr. Shirley King. *Sing-Along with Robert Shaw Program* 15 November 2005, back cover, document in author's possession.

⁶³For more information on music at Bethel College, see Marie D. Goering and Mona D. Goering, "A Brief History of Music at Bethel College, 1985" Special Collections, Bethel Library, North Newton, Kansas.

⁶⁴Elvera Voth, Lenexa, Kansas to Marles Preheim, Hutchinson, Kansas, transcript in author's possession, 21 July 1998, "Plane tickets, accompanist fee, food for three guest artists, any necessary ground transfer for guest artists to be taken from net gate receipts."

⁶⁵Marles Preheim, Hutchinson, Kansas to author, Lenexa, Kansas, transcript in author's possession, 1 September 2005. Final figures were \$45,972.76 income (primarily registration fees which included the song booklet), \$20,432.37 expenses (orchestra, music, bleachers, maintenance, photography, tickets, postage, etc.) resulting in \$25,540.39 profit. A major expense was a set of metal bleachers we purchased to accommodate the four hundred fifty voice choir. The total cost was thirteen thousand five hundred dollars. Bethel Music Department absorbed half and Bethel Athletic Department paid the remainder. The bleachers are now set up in the athletic field, opposite the new stadium complex.

Since you are all going to sing, would you all stand up for a moment so I can see you. The only reason for this being so high is so I can see some of you. Hands over a little bit like this, stretch, and in front, and yawn quietly. Now since you may know the people to your left or right, but you may not know the person in back of you. When I count to three would you turn around and shake hands with the person in back of you. Good . . . good.⁶⁹



Figure 5. Robert Shaw at the Bethel College Benefit Sing-Along.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF THE SING-ALONG

Frank Dominguez's speech introducing Shaw embodied the heart and soul of the Bethel Sing-Along: "The drama and meaning of the entire event—music celebrity, and philanthropy—became crystallized and personalized in his [Dominguez's] story."⁷⁰ Three Bethel professors, deeply impressed with Frank Dominguez's testimony, decided to begin their

⁶⁹Transcription of the Benefit Sing-Along. Shaw was most personable and interested in things related to the Bethel community. For example, when Shaw arrived, he followed Linda Buller, Elvera's niece who helped serve at the Goertz House and Raylene Hinz-Penner, professor at Bethel and spouse of college president, into the kitchen and said something to the effect of, "Let's sit down in the kitchen, have a snack and a drink. Kitchens are better to talk in." Buller said that Shaw was not exclusive in what he wanted to talk about. He was knowledgeable about a variety of things, observant, down to earth, and very interested. For example, in the dressing room before the concert, Buller came in to see if he needed anything. She was wearing a pantsuit that had an embossed design. He curiously asked her how she would clean it. Linda Buller, Wichita, Kansas, telephone interview with author, Lenexa, Kansas, 11 October 2005.

⁷⁰Douglas A. Penner, "Campus Events Inspire and Transform," *Bethel College Bulletin*, winter 1998, 3.

own arts in prison projects. John McCabe-Juhnke, Professor of Communication Arts, took a sabbatical leave during 2000-2001 and began a drama program in the Medium Security Unit at Lansing Correctional Facility in Lansing, Kansas.⁷¹ He drove three hours from Newton, Kansas to Lansing each Wednesday and spent Wednesday and Thursday evenings leading his class in vocal exercises, personal reflections, and dramatic analyses of performance texts. After witnessing his students' spontaneous applause at the end of each participant's first performance assignment, McCabe-Juhnke commented, "It made me see, in a new way, that a mutual appreciation for the creative experience can bring people together in ways that affirm our common humanity and move us to a higher plane of experience."⁷²

Raylene Hinz-Penner began teaching poetry and creative writing to inmates. She taught her first course in Lansing under the guidance of Voth. Since her initial creative writing course through Arts in Prison, Inc., she has taught three courses at the Hutchinson, Kansas Correctional Facility and two at the Women's Correctional Facility in Topeka.⁷³

In the spring of 2002, Marles Preheim began a prison choir in the maximum security unit of the Hutchinson Correctional Facility (HCF). A volunteer prison visitation program known as Match Two (M-2) had been in place in Hutchinson for thirty-five to forty years prior to Preheim's choral program. That fact, combined with the publicity generated by the Bethel Sing-Along about Voth's program, made it easier for Marles to begin his prison choir at HCF.⁷⁴

⁷¹John McCabe-Juhnke, Newton, Kansas to Elvera Voth, Lenexa, Kansas, transcript in author's possession, 12 July 1999. When asked how the Sing-Along influenced his sabbatical program at Lansing, he wrote in an e-mail, "It got me thinking that the expressive arts have much to offer in rehabilitative contexts. The discipline, goal-orientation, cooperation, and expressive abilities that are needed in music and theater are essential skills for surviving inside and outside prison." John McCabe-Juhnke, Newton, Kansas to author, Lenexa, Kansas, 3 October 2005.

⁷²The inmates were asked to first tell a personal experience story to the group, and then tell someone else's story to the group as if it were his own. *Arts in Prison Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2000): 1, 6.

⁷³Raylene Hinz-Penner, Topeka, Kansas, telephone interview with author, Lenexa, Kansas, 4 October 2005.

⁷⁴Marles Preheim, North Newton, Kansas, to author, Lenexa, Kansas, 19 October 2005.

On Saturday, 27 April 2002, Bethel College hosted a Prison Arts Symposium organized by Raylene Hinz-Penner. Hinz-Penner stated that the Benefit Sing-Along inspired and stimulated community interest for educating the community on arts in prison programming.⁷⁵ Four arts in prison specialists spoke to over one hundred fifty participants on this occasion. The presenters were Buzz Alexander, founder of the Prison Creative Arts Project centered at the University of Michigan; Judith Tannenbaum, author of *Disguised as a Poem*, which described her years of teaching poetry to inmates at San Quentin; Bill Cleveland, founder of the Center for the Study of Art and Community; and, of course, Elvera Voth.⁷⁶

The Arts in Prison, Inc. Financial Statement (Table 1) from 1999 shows \$18, 851 in additional funds available as a direct result of the Benefit Sing-Along. Since that time, Arts in Prison, Inc. added numerous classes to its programming, among them classes in visual arts, horticulture therapy, memoir writing, photography, creative writing, public speaking, guitar, poetry, yoga, African American history, film appreciation, clay, and drama. In addition choirs were established in the medium and maximum units at the Lansing, Kansas facility, and a choir was introduced in the Osawatomie, Kansas Correctional Facility's Therapeutic Community Program. Over three hundred inmates have participated in Voth's East Hill Singers and over forty-five people have volunteered to teach arts classes at Lansing through Arts in Prison, Inc. since its inception.⁷⁷

Because of mandatory sentencing guidelines in the United States, many correctional facilities in the late 1990s shifted

⁷⁵Raylene Hinz-Penner, Topeka, Kansas, telephone interview with author, Lenexa, Kansas, 20 October 2005.

⁷⁶Prison Arts Symposium Program. This program was sponsored by Bethel College Mennonite Church, the Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (KIPCOR), Mennonite Central Committee, Offender Victim Ministries, Greer Fine Arts Endowment, and the Peace with Justice Task Force of the Kansas West Conference of the United Methodist Church. See Melanie Zuercher, "Finding a Common Humanity: Symposium at Bethel College Promotes Prison Arts Dialogue." *Newton Kansan*, 1 May 2002; Mike Berry, "Art Thrives Behind Prison Walls: Cultivating Creative Convicts," *Wichita Eagle*, 22 April 2002. See also: Judith Tannenbaum, *Disguised as a Poem: My Years of Teaching Poetry at San Quentin*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000).

⁷⁷ Documents listing former inmate singers and Arts in Prison, Inc. instructors are in the author's possession.

away from a commitment to rehabilitation. Yet, according to some commentators, the need for rehabilitation remains high.⁷⁸

Table 1

Arts in Prison, Inc. 1999 Financial Statement

Revenue:	
Concert donations	3,676
Benefit Sing-Along	25,000
Private support	2,145
Kansas Arts Grant	4,567
Interest	968
Carry over 1998	565
Total cash available	36,922
Expenses:	
Administrative	5,575
Artistic personnel	1,800
Outside artistic fees	325
Outside other fees	959
Travel (mileage)	533
Marketing	551
Operations	7,763
Total expenses	17,506

Carry over to following year (2000): \$19,416

Source: Arts in Prison, Inc. Original in office file at Arts in Prison office, Kansas City, Kansas. Copy in author's possession.

The dynamic duo of Elvera Voth and Robert Shaw contributed, through the Benefit Sing-Along, to a powerful, grass-roots movement toward arts-based rehabilitation and corrections education in Kansas. With a shared vision of how arts can help society, a concomitant belief that group singing could contribute to healing and human transformation, and, not least, considerable organizational savvy, they tapped a vast reservoir of goodwill and concern for social justice among many people. The 1998 Benefit Sing-Along at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas raised money, awareness, and ensured a future for Arts in Prison, Inc.

Perhaps most of all, however, it helped change lives. A former inmate singer wrote to

⁷⁸Sean Nicholson-Crotty, "The impact of sentencing guidelines on state-level sanctions: An analysis over time," *Crime and Delinquency* 50, no. 3 (2004): 395–411. Also, Contemporary practices exhibit some signs of recovering a rehabilitative emphasis. For example, on July 1, 2005 California changed the name of its correctional departments and boards from the Youth and Adult Correctional Agency to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Roderick Q. Hickman, *California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation: Welcome*, Sacramento, California, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, <<http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/>>, accessed 25 October 2005.

one of the Arts in Prison volunteers, "I absolutely hate the behavior that resulted in my incarceration but I have stopped hating myself. It is programs like Arts in Prison that can help me in this process of believing in myself."⁷⁹ A community-volunteer singer likewise attested to the continuing impact of the Bethel Sing-Along:

For me, the whole project that Elvera has started, I think is absolutely a remarkable endeavor and very powerful. People I don't even know, say, 'Oh, I was at a concert,' and it is just on and on and on about how wonderful the experience was for them, and I think if we can continue to do that, I think we will see changed lives and I think that is what it is all about.⁸⁰

For this cause, he vowed, "I will sing until I can't sing anymore."⁸¹

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⁸⁰Duane Graber, interview with author, tape recording, 12 May 2004, Mission, Kansas.

⁸¹Ibid.

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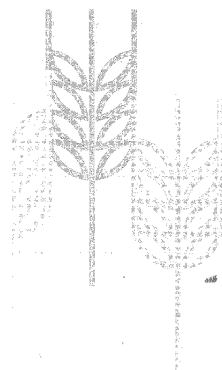
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Appendix 1: *Front Cover of the Benefit Sing-Along Program*

A SING-ALONG
WITH
ROBERT SHAW

TO BENEFIT
ARTS IN PRISON
ELVERA VOTH, DIRECTOR



4:00 p.m., November 15, 1998

Bethel College

Joliffe Auditorium

North Newton, Kansas

*"I never thought I'd miss anything about prison life, but I
will miss this chorus."*

— an East Hill inmate

Appendix 2: Inside of the Sing-Along Program

"Can you imagine what a standing ovation feels like after being told all your life that you are worthless?"

—an East Hill inmate

The Sing-Along Program

For many singers a program of these fourteen works is a choral homecoming. Whether their music is deeply familiar or faintly remembered, the mastery of style and expression epitomize the traditional repertoire. The polyphony of Thomas Luis Victoria is a current that flows, in some way, through all but the hymns. In Bach's b-minor Mass portions, an abstract contrapuntal writing sustains a charged, if not romantic, yearning, while his Passion chorale returns us to a chordal style of the hymn, where all can join for moments no less inspiring for their simplicity. As for Handel's soaring chorus, its Baroque complexity and range are no bar to near-universal, enthusiastic vocality!

No flash photography, please.

"For perhaps the first time, the audience was confronted by a group of male prisoners who challenged our stereotypes about them. Here were men singing powerfully about spiritual realities who, regardless of their failures, were undeniably human along with the rest of us."

—Frank Ward, Pastor Emeritus
Rainbow Mennonite Church

Bourgeois. <i>Old Hundredth</i>	all
Mozart. <i>Ave verum corpus</i>	all
Mendelssohn. <i>He, watching over Israel</i> (from <i>Elijah</i>)	chorus
J. S. Bach. <i>Kyrie eleison</i> (from <i>Mass in b-minor</i>)	chorus
Victoria. <i>O vos omnes</i>	chorus
J. S. Bach. <i>Passion chorale</i> (from <i>Passion according to St. Matthew</i>)	all
Beethoven. <i>Joyful, joyful we adore Thee</i> (hymn)	all
Berlioz. <i>Shepherds' farewell to the Holy Family</i> (from <i>L'Enfance du Christ</i>)	chorus
Brahms. <i>Create in me, O God</i>	chorus
J. S. Bach. <i>Dona nobis pacem</i> (from <i>Mass in b-minor</i>)	chorus
Brahms. <i>How lovely is Thy dwelling place</i> (from <i>A German Requiem</i>)	chorus
<i>Holy God, we praise Thy name</i> (hymn, <i>Katholisches Gesangbuch</i> , 1774)	all
Martin Luther. <i>A mighty fortress is our God</i> (hymn)	all
Handel. <i>Hallelujah</i> (from <i>Messiah</i>)	all