

# The Gift of Music: How the Pacific Youth Choir Has Changed My Life

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I have spent most of my Sunday afternoons for the past eight years at the Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in downtown Portland. It is here where I meet up with the other 280 members of the Pacific Youth Choir (PYC) and together, kindergarteners through high-schoolers, make up the 11 choirs of PYC. What binds us together is our shared love for creating a special atmosphere through music- whether that be through traditional folk songs, music by classical composers, or gospel tunes. Whenever I sing these songs, I am reminded of how fortunate I am to be a part of this amazing organization. PYC has given all of its singers- including me- the incredible gift of music. This gift is so amazing because it touches each of us in truly unique ways. I wanted to share with you how this gift has touched my life.

Currently, I am part of three choirs at PYC: Tsunami (high school men), Pacific (high school women and men combined), and Chamber (top choir at PYC composed of 9th-12th graders). Being a part of these groups enables me to feel the joy of music every Sunday afternoon from 5:25 to 9:00. Every time I sit down to rehearse, I feel at peace because I know that we are all here to create a similar space. For example, currently in the combined high school men and women choir, we are working on a gorgeous piece called Serenity by Ola Gjeilo. As Gjeilo includes at the beginning of the score, "With Serenity, I wanted to write a cappella music that has a symphonic, abundant feel... I love a warm, lush sound that can give a feeling of space and evocativeness, but still be intimate, somehow." This is a great description of how the piece truly feels to me. Because the song has such a special mood to it, all of us remain totally in the music until our conductor drops her hands. Then, we all give a sigh of relief knowing that we had not disturbed that ethereal setting Mr. Gjeilo wanted.

Being a part of these three choirs has also given me so many opportunities to perform with many talented musicians and artists. Besides being able to participate in the three concerts PYC does each season, I am also so fortunate to be able to perform in gigs with the Oregon Symphony, Pink Martini, All Classical Portland, and other groups. One of the most memorable performance experiences I've had thanks to PYC, was actually with a dance group called Whitebird Dance and Steven Petronio. For three nights from March 6 to March 8 of 2014 at the Newmark Theater, we sang music from a small orchestra pit, while the dancers danced on stage. The experience opened me up to the sufferings of African-Americans in our society prior to the Civil Rights Movement. Song titles included "Like Lazarus Did," "Mother's Cry," and "Ain't I A Woman" among others. This was a unique experience for me because it was my first time singing with the Chamber Choir.

The gift of music that PYC has given me is something intangible but so real. When I am rehearsing Serenity with the other members of Pacific, or performing on stage with amazing artists like those of Whitebird Dance and Steven Petronio, I feel a sense of calmness. I just started a book called Thrive by Arianna Huffington in which she redefines success through four pillars. One of these pillars is well-being. She explains how in today's world, we are all *too* connected to the events of the world around us but we are not connected to *ourselves*. Ms. Huffington continues to say how meditation has helped her to reconnect with the person she really is. PYC is my meditation; it's my way of reconnecting with myself. Rehearsals every Sunday afternoon give me a chance to forget about the pressures of real life and through the simple notes and rhythms in the music, I am able to take a short little vacation to a truly magical place. In conclusion, the gift of music that PYC has so generously given to me for the past eight years has allowed me to become a better person through reflection or as Plato put it so eloquently, "Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and to everything."

If you would like to learn more about the Pacific Youth Choir or you would like to make a donation to help spread the joy of music, just visit the PYC website at [pacificyouthchoir.org](http://pacificyouthchoir.org).