

### Threshold Choir 25-year Timeline

Event	Year	Description
<b>First TC Song</b>	2000	Kate Munger writes the song "Guide Me" for bedside singing.
<b>First Meeting of Threshold Choir</b>	2000	Kate Munger assembles singers for the first meeting of Threshold Choir on March 21, 2000.
<b>First TC Choirs Form</b>	2000-2001	Kate starts and directs TC chapters in the East Bay and Marin, San Francisco and Sonoma County, and a year later added Santa Cruz, Bolinas & Peninsula chapters.
<b>Listening at the Threshold CD produced</b>	2004	Kate and Threshold Choir singers record a learning CD in the tunnel at the Marin Headlands with 33 original songs written by members.
<b>Weekly Singing With Women Incarcerated in the Marin County Women's Jail Begins</b>	2004	Kate and Threshold Choir singers from SF Bay Area chapters begin weekly singing circle at Marin County Women's Jail. Privatization of the jail ends the visits in 2013.
<b>Melanie DeMore Embraces TC</b>	2004	Kate befriends Melanie DeMore at a singing retreat, Melanie embraces and supports TC and becomes an ambassador for our mission.
<b>Tenderly Rain CD Produced</b>	2006	A recording of 19 Songs of gratitude, remembrance & keeping watch was made available to members.
<b>First Employee, Maria Culberson</b>	2007	Maria Culberson's contributions as Office Manager from 2007 through 2010 were foundational for the growing choir that had become too much for one person to manage. Kate praised Maria's technical skills and kind heart as the perfect combination that made everything flow.
<b>First of 12 Annual All Choir Gatherings</b>	2007	The first All Choir Gathering, and the next 7 gatherings, were held at Bishop's Ranch in Healdsburg, CA.
<b>Singing initiated at the Marina County Women's Jail</b>	2007	Kate and TC singers begin singing with incarcerated women.
<b>Transition to Nonprofit Completed and Board of Directors Formed</b>	2010	Liability Insurance was obtained, Joy Carlson was elected President of the First Board of Directors under new 501 (C)(3) requirements
<b>Staff Hired for New Nonprofit</b>	2010	Kate Munger continues supporting the choir in the role of Creative Director with Maria Culberson as Managing Director.
<b>Executive Director Hired</b>	2011	Heidi Dressler starts as Executive Director 12/1/2011 with focus of guiding TC with 501(c)(3) compliance.
<b>Membership Dues Initiated</b>	2011	Membership and annual dues replace annual donation request.
<b>Official TC Logo Developed</b>	2011	TC develops a stunning new logo thanks to the efforts of Kate Munger, Pat Friday, Kay Caldwell, Barbara Molloy, and other TC Members, a talented designer and calligrapher, and the colors in Kate's shirt.
<b>New Website with Expanded Capabilities</b>	2012	Ellen Rose and Cathy Baird led the team building the new website that was released at the National Gathering on April 9, 2012. This website replaced the original website developed by Marilyn Chartrand and integrated songs and song notations that had been posted on a website produced by Rhea Schnurman.
<b>Gender Diverse Membership Officially Sanctioned</b>	2013	The board made it official that chapters can determine their gender composition. In 2021.
<b>TC Singing Begins at San Quentin Prison</b>	2013	TC singers are invited to sing at San Quentin prison. They sing with the incarcerated men monthly from 2013 to 2020. After a years long COVID interruption, monthly sings have resumed.
<b>Newsletter Initiated</b>	2013	Joan Linton begins assembling & editing a monthly newsletter. She continued producing the newsletter for 100 issues, retiring from that role at the end of 2024 after recruiting assistance from Faith San Felice.
<b>Kate Produces Walking Each Other Home CD</b>	2014	Third in the foundational CD trilogy of Threshold song recordings is released, a \$10,000 grant from the Lia Fund helped fund the project.

<b>Event</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Leadership Learning Circle (LLC) Project Started</b>	2014	Thirteen leaders completed an in-depth leadership training program led by Kate.
<b>Work Groups Formed by LLC leaders</b>	2014	At the end of 2014, LLC graduates stepped into leadership roles and began applying their talents to TC committees: New-Chapter Coaching Team; Resources; Gatherings; Hospice and Palliative Care Outreach; and Communications.
<b>Kate Retires from Creative Director Role</b>	2014	Kate retired from official duties at the end of the year after training new leadership and recording the <i>Walking Each Other Home</i> CD.
<b>Threshold Choir Songbook - Highlights of the First 15 Years 2000-2015</b>	2015	A music book with 140 favorite TC songs with songwriter contacts and stories is made available to members thanks to the efforts initiated by Kay Caldwell, with support from Ellen Rose, Kate Munger and many others.
<b>Compassionate Care Leadership Award 2016</b>	2016	TC receives a prestigious award from Compassionate Care of California
<b>National Media Coverage</b>	2016	PBS Video, KQED Video, NPR "All Things Considered" radio interview and an interview on "Death: the podcast" in 2016 resulted in a surge in membership.
<b>Last All Choir Gathering</b>	2018	The All Choir Gathering #12 held at the University of Colorado, Boulder, CO, is the last All Choir Gathering to date.
<b>Chapter Agreements Initiated</b>	2019	Affiliated Chapters are required to sign Chapter Agreements in compliance with 501(c)(3)
<b>Diversity and Inclusion Task Force Formed</b>	2019	Edith Lewis offered her services chairing a Threshold Choir Diversity Curriculum Task Force.
<b>Member Services Coordinator Hired</b>	2019	One of Jill Schnipke's first projects as Member Services Coordinator is to establish the collection of data on the number of bedside sings offered each month.
<b>COVID Shut-Down</b>	2020	On March 15, 2020, the COVID shut-down put bedside singing and singing together indefinitely on hold in the US, and in most countries around the world - Choir members learn to stay connected using Zoom
<b>Wealth of Zoom Programing Posted on the Website</b>	2020	Zoom programming is offered to connect, sustain and deliver useful content to members during the COVID shutdown.
<b>First Male Board Member Added</b>	2021	David Grube, MD., joins TC Board of Directors.
<b>Administrative Assistant Hired</b>	2021	Jill Schnipke doesn't renew her Member Services contract when it expired in May. Priscilla Green is hired as Administrative Assistant.
<b>TC Diversity Statement Developed</b>	2021	A Diversity Statement was approved by Board of Directors on 3/17/2021. is posted on the website with supporting curriculum.
<b>Website Updated</b>	2023	After much work by the website committee a new website was rolled out
<b>Heidi Dressler announces she will retire from Executive Director Position</b>	2023	In September, Heidi announces she will retire at the end of the year. She has been guiding succession planning for the organization.
<b>Death of Heidi Dressler</b>	2023	Heidi, our first and only ED since 2011, dies in October of 2023.
<b>Interim Executive Director hired while committee conducted search for new ED</b>	2023	Leeann Enright agreed to take on the role of Interim Executive Director following Heidi's death.
<b>Director, Member and Chapter Development Hired</b>	2024	In February, Carrie Andrews accepts a half-time position as Director, Member and Chapter Development.
<b>Permanent Executive Director Hired</b>	2024	Sarah Simoncini starts as the permanent half-time Executive Director on 7/15/24, Leeann Enright rejoins Board of Directors.
<b>Service Milestone Reached with 23,000 TC Sings</b>	2024	Threshold Choir singers offered "kindness made audible" to over 23,000 recipients in 2024.
<b>Silver Jubilee Committee</b>	2024	Leeann Enright offered to chair the Silver Jubilee Committee, and started planning a year of celebratory events.

Event	Year	Description
<b>Silver Jubilee Arrives!</b>	2025	A monthly journal, a year of celebrations and the Rest Easy recording release mark Threshold Choir's Silver Jubilee.
<b>Rest Easy collection gifted to all active TC members</b>	2025	A free download of the Rest Easy recording, 25 best loved songs in our repertoire, was made available to all active members on TC's 25th birthday, March 21, 2025.
<b>Leeann Enright returns to Interim Director roll when Executive Director gives notice</b>	2025	In June 2025, Sarah Simoncini announced she had to leave her position as ED. Leeann Enright returned to roll of Interim ED.
<b>TC Sponsors "The Last Ecstatic Days" film on PBS</b>	2025	The film about conscious dying is running on all three PBS platforms August 5, 2025 and will continue for 3 years.
<b>US Affiliated Chapters are required to sign a Fiscal Sponsorship Chapter Agreement</b>	2025	A change in nonprofit compliance regulations required the Board to request that chapters sign Fiscal Sponsorship Chapter Agreements in September and submit anticipated chapter budget forms.

## **The History of the First Twenty-Five Years of Threshold Choir**

### **Part 1 - Kate's Story**

Threshold Choir devotees know how founder, Kate Munger, discovered in 1990 that she could comfort her terminally ill friend, and at the same time comfort herself, by singing to him; and many of us know that Kate spent the next ten years purposefully moving toward Threshold Choir. How did she manifest this culture of kindness that has touched so many? Kate's is a story of vision, determination and leadership.

#### **A Musical Childhood**

Yes, Kate's childhood was filled with music. Her mother sang and played piano, and Kate fondly remembers the lullabies her mom sang to each of her five children individually at bedtime. Throughout high school, Kate sang in choruses, and even sang to patients in hospitals with a high school friend. She did not read music, and she spoke of being completely out of her depth as a high school senior when she and a friend tried singing with an accomplished church choir in Montecito, Santa Barbara, and that their failed efforts sent the girls into fits of giggles.

As a student at UC Berkeley, Kate joined the University Chorus singing classical masterpieces. The chorus performed the American premiere of "Symphony of Psalms" by Stravinsky and was greatly honored to have Mr. Stravinsky sitting in the front row. Asked how she managed to learn those intricate choral arrangements without reading music, Kate said that having a good ear allowed her to fake it.

In her twenties, Kate and her mother sang together in a community chorus and her mother helped her learn some of her favorite choral pieces, the "Bach B Minor Mass," "Monteverdi Vespers," and other beloved classical pieces they sang. She loved singing with her mom and says that music kept her close to her mother her entire life.

Kate also credits her mother for a pivotal moment in her life when she saw her lovingly stroking her grandmother's arm after she died. Seeing her mother's kind and intimate treatment of a dead body smoothed the way for Kate to want more familiarity, more comfort with, and more respect for people who have died. When her father was dying, her mother's openness and grieving before and during his terminal illness made for a smooth transition.

Looking back on her childhood, Kate can see that her father's influence planted a spiritual seed. He was a minister who was not big on organized religion. He worked primarily as a teacher and a headmaster at a private school, and his great joy was performing weddings. She said that in payment for the weddings he asked only for a rock from the couple's garden. Kate says she is not a church goer, although she does claim to be a member, and the originator of, the First Church of the Whole Enchilada, believing there is spirit and energy in everything.

Kate's frequent question about how many Threshold Choir Singers were Girls Scouts prompted a question about her Girl Scout experience. She said she loved the idea of being a scout. At a campfire circle with Brownies when she was eight years old, she remembers realizing that she was exactly where she was supposed to be, doing exactly what she was supposed to be doing. She was twelve when her family moved to Berkeley and she joined the Girl Scouts.

Kate also heard the Weavers' music for the first time at eight years old, and was struck by Ronnie Gilbert's clean, clear & joyful voice. At thirteen, she learned to play guitar and had a reputation as a "folkie." Sixty years after first hearing the Weavers, Ronnie became a dear friend, and Kate joined a circle of people who supported her as she was aging. She and Melanie DeMore drove to Mendocino every three months to visit her. The CD *Walking Each Other Home* is dedicated to Ronnie Gilbert.

### **Activism and Education**

The connection of music and political activism are a natural for Kate, and in 1965 she worked for the National Farmworkers Association in Delano, California, and met Cesar Chavez. There she witnessed firsthand how, "Music and dancing played an important role in organizing and energizing farm workers to unite and strike." The grape strike that started on September 6, 1965, in Delano would last five years and result in improved conditions for all farm workers.

Kate said that her last year at UC Berkeley ended in a haze and she left before graduating. Studying with a beloved teacher at Sierra University, she obtained a Master's Degree in Body Oriented Psychotherapy in 1986.

Kate moved to Inverness in 1970, where her grandmother had established a family home, joined the West Marin Community Chorus, and studied to become a massage therapist. Her massage teacher recommended her for a position providing massage and cooking for touring jazz fusion saxophonist, Paul Winter. She toured with the musician and his "consort" from 1970 until her son was born in 1979. Winters was a collaborative musician, incorporating world music, whale's songs and other animal sounds to create "earth music." It was a good fit for Kate, who benefited from the exposure to the innovative music and musicians. In addition to cooking and providing massage, she was captain of the volleyball team the summer of 1978 when the Paul Winter Consort recorded *Common Ground*.

### **Song Leader and Music Teacher**

When home in Inverness during the '70s, Kate worked as a massage therapist and immersed herself in community singing. She recorded *The Lullaby Tape* (remember cassette tapes?) when her son Kalloch was small and made two recordings—*The Circle That Holds Us* and *Lullaby Bay*—with a group she started, The Wabi Sabi Singers. In 1975, she started a full moon women's round singing group in Inverness that usually met outside. Participants came from all over the Bay Area to sing to the moon, and interest from those participants inspired her to launch women's round singing groups in Napa, Sonoma County, San Francisco and Berkeley. She continued to lead those five rounds groups until she started Threshold Choir in March 2000. This was before computers were prominent; Kate mailed postcards to her singing contacts to publicize the meetings. She funded her song leading endeavors by passing the pouch and asking for donations that are "generous, affordable and personally significant." At the same time, she was singing with the Occidental Choir under the direction of Allaudin Mathieu, a brilliant musician whom she considers an important teacher and a great supporter of the work she chose to do with Threshold Choir.

When her son's school needed a music teacher, Kate stepped in to become a Classroom Music Educator in elementary and middle school. For ten years, she taught music to as many as 600 students every week in two school districts in West Marin. Encouraging third, fourth and fifth graders to write and perform their own songs meant Kate had to learn to notate them. Kate was also beginning to write her own songs. She taught herself to read music by scoring simple songs, plunking notes out on piano. To anyone who wants to teach themselves to score music, Kate recommends starting with simple songs like nursery rhymes.

## **Threshold Choir History - Part 2**

### **Kate's Story, Continued**

#### **Finding Her Bliss**

Kate will tell you that all she has done in her life led her Threshold Choir. When she felt confident about her songwriting and had taught herself how to use Listserv to send group emails, she reached out to her singing communities to invite them to the first meeting of Threshold Choir in March of 2000. It was a magical night according to Kate. Susan Graves, one of the eleven women who participated, describes it this way, "Kate gathered people to illuminate their minds and hearts with this wild idea. There was stardust in the room." The momentum prompted Kate to start Threshold Choir chapters in the East Bay and Marin, followed by San Francisco and Sonoma County, and a year later she added Santa Cruz, Bolinas & Peninsula chapters.

The year 2000 was monumental for Kate. After starting Threshold Choir, she "got to bow to and feel the extraordinary presence of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama," in June of that year. Attending an international Buddhist teachers conference at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, Kate signed up to be on the kitchen staff. Standing by the kitchen entrance she watched His Holiness arrive in a limousine with his diplomatic entourage. Seeing his beautiful face, she bowed. After his arrival, the Tibetan community flooded the center and a tiny Tibetan woman came to the kitchen to prepare his porridge. Kate explained, "I had brought two pink lily buds from my garden. I asked the woman if His Holiness would like these flowers on his tray, and she nodded. The flowers had opened by that time and they went up to him on his lunch tray. Twenty minutes later I'm standing at a big stainless sink and all of a sudden energy is pouring through me and I have to hold on to stand up." She knew this was an acknowledgement of her gift. She was honored to have had an opportunity to meditate with His Holiness at the gathering. When she was in her car leaving the retreat, his entourage drove by and she pulled over and bowed to him. Thinking about the experience of being passed on the road by His Holiness, she wrote this song, "You never know when the guy in the car in front of you might be the Dalai Lama, or his mamma."

In October of 2000, Kate traveled to a gathering of the Children's Music Network in Upstate New York bringing songs that she had written, and songs by others that she had chosen specifically for bedside singing. As a music teacher, she had been to many of these gatherings over the years. She felt a deep connection with this group of exceptional performers, librarians and parents who created ethical, interesting, inspiring music for children. This time, she was privileged to be introduced to Pete Seeger and to talk with him for half an hour going through twelve pages of Threshold Choir repertoire together. She said she was so awestruck, "I don't know how I was able to speak with him."

#### **Threshold Repertoire**

The great body of magnificent sacred music that exists in the world did not speak to Kate's desire for music for bedside singing that is inclusive for people, like her, who were spiritual, not religious. It was important to Kate to create a body of non-denominational songs with a "prayerful presence" that "made kindness audible." Kate started Threshold Choir with songs she had written specifically for bedside singing and songs written by professional songwriter friends

and colleagues like Terry Garthwaite, Becky Reardon and Velma Frye, that contributed to the mission. In time, the repertoire grew to include songs written by members inspired by the work.

Those of us who started singing with Threshold Choir before 2015 have great affection for the extensive repertoire of over 350 songs that Kate scored by hand. That cherished collection of music was copied and shared until it became nearly illegible. When concern was raised for the legality of sharing music with only verbal permission from songwriters, Kay Caldwell took on the task of publishing a new songbook of Threshold favorites from 2000 - 2015 with all the required legal written permissions. A repertoire committee headed by Ellen Rose worked diligently to get legal permissions and to score 147 songs from the repertoire that were chapter favorites and that Kate felt had the power to touch hearts.

### **Melanie DeMore, The Best friend a Choir Ever Had**

After Betsy Rose introduced her to Melanie DeMore's song "Sending You Light," Kate remembers singing it over and over driving home from Oakland that night, offering the song as prayer every time a friend's face appeared in her mind. This certainly explains the origins of the ritual of members bringing the names of loved ones in need of healing energy into the circle and singing the chorus of "Sending You Light" that almost all Threshold Choir chapters regularly practice.

Kate and Melanie first met on December 4, 2004, as presenters at a singing retreat in Sonoma County. The connection was instantaneous. "In August of 2004, I invited Melanie to join me, Terry Garthwaite and Becky Reardon at the Lama Foundation, and she has been with us ever since." Threshold Choir members have been the fortunate recipients of Melanie's generous offerings of heart-centered songs, commanding songleading skills, vocal coaching and the culturally diverse music and history she shares with the choir ever since.

### **The Gift of Purpose**

Kate said that after starting the choir, "everything that happened was saying 'YES.'" She admits having been in a constant state of bliss for the first ten years of the choir. The work was her destiny, "Every move I made, I could feel was my assignment. I was uniquely positioned to pull it off and not be freaked out by how fast it moved. I would think about the city of Chicago and I would get a call from Chicago from someone who wanted to start a choir there."

In 2004, Kate added a weekly singing circle with the women incarcerated at the Marin County Women's Jail. Kate, and the Threshold Choir members who participated in those singing circles, were deeply moved by the women's appreciation for the singing and how the music lifted their spirits. Singing at the county jail continued until a change of leadership shut down the visits in 2013 and Kate was invited to start monthly singing with the men at San Quentin State Prison.

By 2010, the Threshold Choir had grown to nearly 100 chapters, including eleven international chapters. Kate was personally leading seven Threshold Choir chapters in fourteen choir practices each month, plus four or five visits to Marin County Jail each month. In addition, she was often invited to speak to gatherings of hospice providers and choral directors around the country, she traveled internationally assisting in the launch of new choirs, participated in regional gatherings and national gatherings, and directed singing circles that included the annual Compline Concerts

at Stanford University, workshops at the Lama Foundation, and days of singing in the Bay Area and beyond. She was driving 33,000 miles a year and hopping on a plane every couple of weeks.

Asked how she managed to accomplish all of this, Kate answered that it was the bliss and the tremendous sense of purpose and commitment that motivated her. She also mentioned the great love she felt, and continues to feel, for all who have embraced this work and carry it forward with such care and kindness.

The first Board of Directors was formed in October of 2010 as Threshold Choir prepared to transition to a non-profit with 501(c)3 status. The new Board, with Joy Carson as Chair; Pat Friday as Vice-Chair; Kay Caldwell as Secretary; Kelsey Ramage as Acting Treasurer; and Barb Adams; Marilyn Meikle; and Barbara Molloy, would lead the organization in an exciting time of growth with the objective of sustainability. Kate Munger was hired as Creative Director with Maria Culbertson as Managing Director, Threshold's first official staff. Kate spoke of how much she adored working with Maria as they tackled communications and support for new chapters and regional and international gatherings. Kate also mentioned the incredible support Ellen Rose and Cathy Baird provided with their dedication to the creation and workings of the website. I appreciated Ellen's lightning fast responses to the many questions I had as a new chapter leader.

We will explore the growth of the organization, the transition to non-profit status, hiring an Executive Director, development of the Threshold Choir Logo, the contributions of the Boards of Directors and Committees, and more, in future chapters of this tribute to the History of Threshold, the First Twenty-Five Years.

## Threshold Choir History - Part 3

### Transitioning

*"We're Building the Ship as We Sail It"*  
Kay Ryan

Joy Carlson was named Chair of the Board of Directors of the International Threshold Choir in October 2010 when Directors & Officers Insurance was acquired, a requirement for the newly attained 501(c)(3) status. Kay Caldwell and Barb Adams, members of the 2010 and 2011 Boards, shared their memories and meeting minutes from those pivotal years.

Kate began working toward a sustainable nonprofit model for the growing organization when she convened a group of choir members for an Inaugural Board Meeting in January 2009. That group met three times in 2009 and continued to meet in 2010, forming committees to research and make suggestions for an organizational structure, bylaws, board assessment and recruiting, fundraising, strategic planning and repertoire and recordings.

Under Joy's direction, the Board of the newly formed nonprofit went to work developing transparent and accurate financial systems, personnel policies and realistic budgets. A committee was tasked with finding candidates for the Executive Director position. The Board also addressed the need to increase financial support for the growth of the organization, projects such as logo and website development needed to be funded. After much deliberation, the Board decided that as of March 2011, membership with annual dues would replace the optional donation model that had been in place since the founding of the Choir.

With the support of the Choir's Managing Director, Maria Culberson, and the Board of Directors, Kate's incredible breadth of activities as Creative Director and Founder continued. In 2010, she helped launch new chapters and conducted introductory workshops for new chapter members, participated in Regional Gatherings (there were six in 2010), the All Choir Gathering and the Director's meeting at Bishop's Ranch May 2-7, offered Holiday Community Singing, gave presentations when invited, and organized Threshold Choir concerts. In May of 2010, she cut back from leading fifteen monthly rehearsals and weekly singing at the Marin County Jail to eight monthly rehearsals plus weekly jail singing.

By 2011, the Choir had swelled to eighty-four chapters nationwide and two in Canada. Kate continued traveling to support new chapters, give presentations about the Choir, and attend All Choir Gatherings and the regional gatherings that occurred throughout the year. The Choir's founder also continued leading eight chapter rehearsals a month, singing weekly with the women incarcerated at the Marin County Jail, which was in its seventh year, and offering concerts and workshops for members. New songs were written and added to the repertoire. The membership dues that were initiated generated 53% of the choir's income that year.

At a Board retreat with three days of meetings from November 11 to November 13, 2011, Board members, Joy Carlson, Kay Caldwell, Barbara Malloy, Kelsey Ramage, Pat Friday, Jacquie

Robb, Barb Adams, and staff, Kate Munger, were faced with a colossal challenge. Joy had given notice that she was stepping down as Chair, and with no other members able or willing to take on the position, the possibility of dissolving the newly formed 501(c)(3) and reverting back to a single leader was seriously discussed. Recognizing the barriers this presented for fundraising and sustainability, Kay Caldwell volunteered to chair the Board, with two conditions; 1) that Heidi Dressler was hired as Executive Director, and 2) that Kate was onboard with the plan.

All agreed. Of the three applicants the Board interviewed for the Director position, Heidi Dressler's business and non-profit experience was what the Choir needed at this point in the evolution of the organization. The vote was unanimous, Kay became the Board's Chairperson and Heidi was offered a half-time position as Threshold Choir's Executive Director starting on December 1, 2011. Kate would stay on half-time as Creative Director and Maria was asked to stay on until December 16, 2011, to train the new Executive Director in current procedures.

There was no playbook for transitioning Kate's unique concept for Threshold Choir to a sustainable enterprise that would continue to promote the mission with the compassion and generosity established by Kate. In addition to meeting requirements for tax-exempt nonprofit status, the organization had to figure out how to best assist the growing number of chapters and individual members in the work they were doing across the US and in Canada, and how to keep us all connected. In this new, expanded leadership model, not everyone agreed on the path forward. Kay Caldwell said the title of a poem by Kay Ryan accurately described how she felt about the work, "We're Building the Ship as We Sail It."

Recognizing the need for Threshold Choir to transition to a nonprofit, Kay Caldwell participated in meetings with Kate beginning in 2009, became an official member of the Board of Directors in 2010, and served on the Board until 2015. She joined Threshold Choir after singing in Kate's rounds groups. She became part of the Sonoma County Threshold Choir when Kate founded it in 2000, and remains active in that chapter, serving as Director for many years. She later also became active in the Valley of the Moon chapter. Kay volunteered to be part of the Repertoire and Recordings Committee, the website and the logo committees, and, with the assistance of Ellen Rose and her team obtaining written permissions and producing the song notations, Kay produced the *Threshold Choir Songbook, Highlights from 2000-2015*.

Barb Adams knew that non-profit tax status was essential for organizations that depend on public donations and wanted to help guide the organization to sustainable growth. Passionate about the Threshold Choir mission, Barb was motivated to join the first Board of Directors because she was concerned about the organization's financial stability. The harp-playing music therapist and director of the fifteen-member Vashon Threshold Choir for twenty years is one of the seven members who volunteered to serve on Threshold Choir's first official Board of Directors in 2010. She continued serving on the Board until 2012 and on committees after that. Barb first joined the Choir in 2005 after seeing a story in the local newspaper about Threshold Choir chapters led by Jan Thomas forming in Seattle and on Vashon Island. Within four months, Barb became the director of the Choir on charming Vashon, the wooded eight-mile-long island in Washington State's Puget Sound accessible only by boat or public ferry that is her home.

In this twenty-fifth year of Threshold Choir, we look back to honor the work of the Founder, the Managing Director, the Executive Director and all who stepped up to do the strategic planning work that has nurtured the organization envisioned by Kate Munger. Sincere gratitude to all whose passion for supporting the mission would lead them to serve on the Boards of Directors and committees that helped the Choir arrive at this remarkable milestone.

In the next installments of the history of Threshold Choir, we will delve into the work that went into creating our beloved logo, the development of the website, and take a look at the committees formed to support and expand on the work begun by Kate.

## **Threshold Choir History - Part 4 The Logo Miracle**

In 2011, the Threshold Choir Board of Directors began the conversation about a new logo. Kate Munger wrote, "The initial logo (on the cover of *Listening at the Threshold*, our first CD) was from a photo that Margy Henderson took of one of our first sings in the Tunnels above the Golden Gate Bridge. Helen Greenspan, Sherrin Lloyd and Jill Lessing are recognizable, and it was a logo that meant a lot to us but didn't really translate out to the real world."

Pat Friday, Kay Caldwell, and Barbara Molloy, all with backgrounds in graphic design, worked closely with Kate Munger on the endeavor. Barbara Molloy explained, "We had already made serious efforts to come up with a new logo, drawing on all kinds of choir members, friends, colleagues and students, to no avail. I had a colleague on the UC Davis design faculty help me elicit design drafts from some of our best students."

Kate remembers the logo breakthrough this way, "Pat heard that the biggest design agency in San Francisco had a nonprofit offshoot called Joey's Corner. Michael Osborne's son Joey died in a snowboarding accident and he started Joey's Corner to honor his son and to collaborate with nonprofits on projects he thought his musician son would have loved. A very low fee was offered to these projects. Miraculously, we won the account. We met with Michael at least three times, sang for him in the chair and he wept, of course."

"During one of the design meetings, Michael looked at the colors Kate was wearing, and landed on the purple-violet color palette from that," Barbara Molloy explained.

Kate reported that "after some weeks of meetings with us and listening carefully, Michael contacted Georgia Deaver, a prominent calligrapher in San Francisco. He thought and we agreed that the flow and grace of calligraphed letters would carry the essence of our work to the public. She did a wonderful job and we were overjoyed with the resulting logo.

Within about a year, Georgia had a health crisis and we asked if we could come sing for her. Barbara came from Davis, Kay from Santa Rosa and I came from Inverness to her home in SF. Singing for her was an honor. There were tears, tenderness, and connection all through this process." Georgia died in March 2013.

Kate thanked Pat, Kay, and Barbara, and the others on the Threshold Choir Board and staff at that time, Joy Carlson, Barb Adams, Kelsey Ramage, and Maria Culbertson, for their good work on this project. She also expressed gratitude to Michael Osborne and Cedar Mathis at Joey's Corner, and appreciation for the gift and memory of Georgia Deaver.

Barbara Molloy contributed this addendum to the logo story, "I can say that many times, I have shared the story of this process with my UCD design students, especially when talking with them about the design process. I let them know that even seasoned design pros like Michael Osborne and Georgia Deaver generate many different draft ideas before settling on their final design as the most effective design solution. Perhaps as a way of introducing Georgia to us through her work, Michael got out thick 3-ring binders, filled with page after page of design ideas for various wine labels they'd worked on together. Too often, people stop with their first or second good idea, rather than pressing on to a really great idea.

There's a reason that successful logos ("identities" is the trade term) are some of the costliest designs to create. And this is some of the history/herstory of how and why we did not have to try to come up with thousands of dollars for our world class logo. Perhaps we earned it in another way, each time we sing our Threshold songs. We can be very proud of both the design and the provenance of our logo. I'm truly grateful for the stellar work of all the talented designers who contributed to it. I'm deeply grateful to have been part of the process."

Many thanks to Kate Munger and Barbara Molloy for sharing their memories of the birth of our iconic Threshold Choir logo, and to Ellen Rose for her part editing this material.

## **Threshold Choir History - Part 5**

### **The Websites**

Ellen Rose and Cathy Baird, two “Silicon Valley” (Peninsula TC) members, provided this history for the website that was active from 2012-2023.

#### **Early Threshold Choir Websites**

First, there was a Threshold Choir website created by Marilyn Chartrand (TS of the East Bay). It was a simple presentation of the Threshold Choir service and mission, including chapter locations and how to contact Kate Munger.

Rhea Schnurman created a significant addition: a website linked into the main site in order to make song notations available. There was no concept of “membership” like there is today; instead, singers would ask Kate for a log-in so they could access the dozens of songs notated and posted by Rhea.

#### **Planning a New Website**

In August of 2011, Kate was exploring the notion of building a new website for the organization, to highlight its newly adopted nonprofit structure, corporate identity, and logo. Mentioning that idea to a friend resulted in a significant donation, making it possible to move the notion forward into being a real project!

Kate convened a website team, including members of the Board (primarily Kay Caldwell and Barbara Molloy, with Pat Friday, Kelsey Ramage, and Barb Adams contributing) and members of the choir (Cathy Baird and Ellen Rose, with Therese Fisher, Lisa Kreeger, and others contributing). As Board chair, Kay became the team leader, while we gravitated toward the technical side. Over the next few months, Ellen and Cathy worked with the team to draft a requirements document for the features Threshold Choir would want and need.

Supporting our choir membership was an important requirement for the website, and there were lots of details to work out to ensure ease of use and value for new members, renewing members, chapter leaders, and the administration.

#### **Choosing Our Web Development Team**

The next task was to begin a search for website contractors that might suit our requirements and our budget. We asked members for any leads they might have, and the team interviewed several candidates, some more than once as we compared notes and evaluated options. In late December 2011, we chose contractor Kim Hadley (of Imagination’s Everything), who was recommended by member Path Star (Aromas TC). Kim was wonderful to work with— as a designer, she really got who we were and what we wanted to convey, and she brought in Justin Tucker (of Planet Tucker) to write the underlying code.

## Planning Look, Feel, and Content

As the contractors got started, Cathy and Ellen worked with the Board on the public-facing side— what info did we want to make available, and in particular, what “first impression” should the homepage create of Threshold Choir. We started with the new Threshold Choir logo and colors, then asked choir-member photographers if they had photos they’d be willing to share. We received many individual submissions, as well as rich troves of photos from both Kay Caldwell and Venus Maher, several of which were used to add color and interest, and of course the smiling faces of our singers, to the public pages.

The website team requested a collaborative working session with the Board to consider the look and content of the website’s public pages. Hoping to catch everyone in town, we tacked the meeting onto their board meeting in San Francisco on January 8, 2012.

First, we talked about the informative pages, like our service, our values, how to join, and so on. Here we are walking in circles, contemplating a table full of sticky notes with ideas for content.



*This photo, taken by Marilyn Chartrand (we think!), shows (L to R) Barbara Molloy, Pat Friday, Ellen Rose, Kelsey Ramage, Cathy Baird, and Kate Munger*

The next task was to choose the featured photo for the home page. Given that a couple of the candidates were her own photos, Kay chose to leave the room, saying that she thought it best to leave the choice up to us. We set out six or seven photos and walked around and around the table in deep contemplation and discussion.

In the end, there was strong agreement that Kay Caldwell's moonrise photo was The One. It coordinated with the theme colors and also touched the core of our work— the spirit rising serenely above the mountains while twilight becomes night. That photo and our calligraphed logo represented us perfectly— our roots, our intentions, our craft, our service. Later, when asked how the photo came about, Kay said, “I took this photo on September 6, 2006 on my way to choir rehearsal. It was my mom's 82nd birthday. She had become too weak to continue coming with me to rehearsals, so I had a lovely birthday dinner with her and my daughters and grandchildren before coming to choir. This scene presented itself to me on the drive. Luckily, I had my camera in the car. It felt like a gift of beauty to me honoring her. She died a year later.”



We also added a border along the top of the page to include a bit of Kate’s iconic handwritten music notation for her song, “Guide Me”, because that’s what a website should do (wink wink).



*“Guide me through the darkness. Guide me through the light. Abide with me through seas of doubt And in the sacred starry night.”*

### **Going Live, April 2012**

We asked the website contractors if they could please have the new website up and running by April 9 so we could debut it at the 2012 National Gathering. That was only about twelve weeks start to finish, but somehow they did it. Board member Kelsey Ramage consulted her astrological charts and determined that the most propitious time to “go live” was 6:00 AM on April 4th. All was ready. The time came, the button was pushed, and... it failed. Turned out to be a problem with internet registration, not with the website, so after many phone calls, a switch was flipped, and our website went live at about 1:00 PM that afternoon. Yay!

## **Threshold Choir History - Part 6**

### **2012-2014**

#### **2012**

The Board members guiding Threshold Choir in 2012 were Kay Caldwell, Chair; Cesca Wright, Vice-chair; Susan Randazzo, Secretary; Kelsey Ramage, Treasurer; Susan Graves, Leeann Enright, and Karen Friis.

The choir entered its second year as a non-profit organization with a logo expressing the grace and simplicity of the service offered, and a website providing support, connection and repertoire to members and a portal to Threshold Choir services for the wider world. The Board of Directors, Kate, and Heidi pursued goals of improving support for members and leaders, nurturing connection and learning opportunities through gatherings, improved communications, and developing funding sources and infrastructure that would contribute to the sustainability of the organization. With the help of Cathy Baird, Ellen Rose continued to administer and improve the website, while scoring and obtaining permissions for core songs and migrating repertoire to the website. Ellen also traveled with Kate to some of the gatherings and presentations.

Kate Munger reported traveling to Threshold Regional Gatherings in MA, OH, IL, CO, So Cal, NM and helping fledgling chapters in Asheville, Nashville, Chattanooga, Huntsville, Atlanta, and Macon, and visited chapters in NYC, Oakland, Sacramento, and Ft. Bragg in CA. In her travels spreading the word about Threshold Choir and leading community singing, she went to Yale University for the Inaugural Choral Festival, and the National Women's Music Festival in Madison, WI. She was guest presenter at a Music That Makes Community retreat, and at a Women's Spirituality Conference. Nine new chapters joined the choir in 2012.

#### **2013**

The hard-working board members who served on the Threshold Choir International (TCI) Board in 2013 included Kay Caldwell, Chair; Cesca Wright, Vice-chair; Susan Randazzo, Secretary; Kelsey Ramage, Treasurer; Susan Graves; Leeann Enright; and Karen Friis.

Communications took a leap forward in 2013 with the initiation of a newsletter edited by Joan Linton. Outreach was expanded through Facebook and LinkedIn and a spate of good PR that included the Huffington Post, NPR, Planetree Conference and New Yorker of the week (our own Sue Ribaud).

A boost from PR and Kate's impactful presentations helped Executive Director, Heidi Dressler, make headway on her goal of developing more diversified funding sources. There was an increase in employer matching funds and donations from the year-end letter, and a \$10,000 grant from The Lia Fund along with a number of donor-directed grants.

Eight Threshold Choir Regional Gatherings were produced during the year in addition to the All Choir Gathering. With the aid and support of the organization, fifteen new choirs were formed including members in four English speaking countries: USA, Canada, Australia and Great Britain. After much consideration, the board made it official that chapters could determine their gender composition. One hundred new songs were added to the repertoire.

Kate continued her outreach and reported giving presentations on singing at bedsides to the Sonoma County Foster Parent Consortium, Chorus America, Women's Voices for Change, Turtle Dove Singing Week, the San Francisco Palliative Care Nurses Consortium, Unitarian Churches in San Francisco and Palo Alto, CA, and Alamosa, CO, and probably the most concentrated and most far reaching, at the Planetree International Convention in Montreal. For two days Kate, Ellen Rose and Sue Ribaud sang for conference attendees devoted to Patient Centered Hospital Care. Many good connections were made, and seeds were planted for new choirs.

As 2013 came to a close, Kate announced that she would retire from her role as Threshold Choir's Creative Director at the end of 2014.

## **2014**

The dedicated 2014 TCI Board of Directors consisted of Co-chairs, Cesca Wright & Susan Randazzo, and members Karen Friis, Leeann Enright, and Susan Graves.

Ellen Rose and Cathy Baird continued their work developing the website and making it an effective tool to support member resources and registration for gatherings, provide data about membership and growth, post new songs and link them to search functions, and creating public pages for chapters and Member Marketplace pages for member CDs and books. Kay Caldwell worked with Ellen to solicit lists of core songs and permissions for the songbook Kay was assembling. Ellen and Claire Paul received unanimous appreciation for organizing the All choir Gathering 2014 in Los Gatos, CA.

Our Creative Director, Kate Munger, completed two major projects before stepping back from her official Threshold Choir duties in December of 2014. She finished the production of "Walking Each Other Home," third in the foundational CD trilogy of Threshold songs, and she coached thirteen women in a Leadership Learning Circle (LLC).

Kate had long recognized the need to offer training for leadership roles in Threshold Choir. In May of 2014, a committee working with Kate solicited applications and selected thirteen leaders to serve on the LLC: Doreen Conte, Marti Mariette, Jean Turrell, Charlotte Million, Jan Alexander, Robin Rose, Kristin Masters, Winnie Lee, Helen Greenspan, Claire Paul, Marissa Bentivoglio, Marilyn Rampley, and Kri Schlafer. The participants represented seven states, and Vancouver, Canada, and offered a range of Threshold Choir experience. The Lia Fund grant made it possible for the TCI Board to hire Jana Freiberger to serve as coordinator for the LLC. When Jana requested the LLC nominate two members of the group to serve as a coordinating committee to help her facilitate the work of the LLC, Claire Paul and Doreen Conte were chosen.

Following are excerpts from a message from Kate that was posted in the minutes of the June 10, 2014 LLC Retreat that provide a glimpse of LLC goals and the process to reach those goals.

*"It is my pleasure to be the one to send you this document collaboratively written by all the Leadership Learning Circle (LLC) members. On behalf of the Board and Heidi and all the leadership of the Threshold Choir to this date, we are witnessing a wonderful, graceful and clear transfer of the leadership of this choir we all love so well. I am terribly grateful to everyone who had a hand in making this possible. I am hopeful this will create a beautiful structure for the future*

*of the Threshold Choir. This group has committed themselves to be communicative and interactive with the whole community.*

*All blessings,  
Kate*

*On June 9th, fifteen Threshold Choir members and Leeann Enright, the board representative, gathered in Chicago to begin the process of planning and preparing for the sacred and important threshold of shifting Threshold Choir from a founder-led to a community-led organization as Kate moves out of her leadership role at the end of the year. With hearts full of hope and deep care for upholding the integrity of Kate's vision, we came together to envision our future in carrying on this ancient and sacred work of nurturing souls as they transition from life to death through music, song, loving presence, and kindness. We worked for four days as midwives, attending and honoring both the birthing of ideas and strategies and the articulation and affirmation of our core values, as well as the loss/transition of things as they have been with Kate as our leader."*

*"We then created strategies for ensuring the sustenance and growth of Threshold Choir through outreach (Marissa rocked it out with her Social Media experience!), fundraising, resources for all T.C. members (i.e. support and guidance for choirs wanting to have a regional gathering), mentorship, and leadership and skill development (i.e. running a choir, song-leading, blending, death awareness). Kate gave two incredible sessions on Speaking to the Public about T.C. and Bedside Singing.*

*We laughed, argued, cried, shared deep and personal stories, compromised, stuck to our guns, supported each other in practicing leadership, appreciated the enormity of the task with which we were charged, and, of course, sang (though not enough). We acknowledged our immeasurable gratitude to Kate for bringing her vision to life, and to all of our lives, and to the lives of all whom we serve. And she reminded us so beautifully during a time when we were struggling, with tears in her eyes, to stop when we are struggling so hard—to stop everything and sing, to apply the medicine we have to each other. It is our music, our songs, and singing together that will align us again with our purpose and values.*

*This is how we begin, practicing for the end...to begin again.*

*In gratitude and service,  
Your LLC"*

Following the June retreat in Chicago, LLC members met bi-monthly utilizing a combination of technologies that were available at the time to connect members across 3,000 miles and three time zones. From the end of August through the beginning of November 2014, all members of the LLC participated in one or more regional gatherings and some local workshops as part of Kate's training. In September, the group met with Executive Director, Heidi Dressler and Board member, Leeann Enright, to learn about the operations of (TCI). LLC members said that the meeting helped them better understand how LLC can support the organization by performing duties relating to Kate's Creative Director position.

At the culmination of the training, LLC participants formed the work groups listed below to support the mission of TCI. Information about the committees that evolved from these groups and acknowledgment of the many choir members who have continued to carry on this work will be included in future installments of the Threshold Choir history.

The New-Chapter Coaching Team - Jan, Charlotte, Kri, Marilyn & Ellen Rose. Marilyn Rampley shared this about her experience years of experience as a coach, *"Be sure to highlight the efforts and expertise of Ellen Rose. She is the 'mother' of coaching and did it for years, working closely with Kate. I was so happy to join her as a trainee, and we worked together closely for several years. Ellen had the vision, practical expertise and heart for this work. Everything I did I learned from Ellen."*

Resources - Robin Rose, who developed a training manual that was helpful to so many of us early on, stepped into the role of creating and collecting resource materials across a wide range of topics to be made available on the website. The resources and training materials available to members on our website continue to expand.

Gatherings - Claire Paul chaired this group with assistance from Jan Alexander. They provided guidance and support with collaborators to facilitate annual international gatherings and assistance to chapters for regional gatherings.

Hospice and Palliative Care Outreach Committee - Doreen Conte and Marti Mariette co-chaired this committee to initiate and strengthen TC's ties to hospice and palliative care professional organizations.

Communications Committee - Marissa Bentivoglio, Winnie Lee and Charlotte Million provided support to the organization through internal and external channels. Heidi was initially the chair of this committee.

Note: The information presented here was compiled from Annual Reports (beginning 2010), minutes from monthly board meetings (beginning April 2013), LLC meeting minutes and input from choir members.

## **Threshold Choir History - Part 7 2015 - 2017**

### **2015**

The talented leadership team serving on the Threshold Choir (TC) Board of Directors in 2015 included: Katharine Kirner, Chair; Nancy Roberts-Brown, Vice-Chair; Leeann Enright, Treasurer; April Boyden, Secretary; Susan Graves, Director; and Cherry Tinker, Director.

In the Annual Report for 2015, the outgoing Chair of the Board of Directors, Cesca Wright, had this to say about facing the first year without Kate as Creative Director, "Our founder, Kate Munger, has blessed the collective to carry the mission forward. We are in awe of all she held for so many years. We have become leaderful."

Thanks to the efforts of Kay Caldwell, Ellen Rose, Kate Munger, and many other contributors, the *Threshold Choir Songbook, Highlights From the First Fifteen Years 2000-2015* became available for members to purchase. In addition, fifty-five learning tracks for songs were posted on the website and membership renewal was streamlined to two clicks.

The 2015 All Choir Gathering was held at Presentation Center in Los Gatos, California, for the second year. The Board recognized the value of All-Choir Gatherings for training, connection, income, singing, shared values, identification with the larger organization, leadership development, and maintaining momentum. It was decided that it would best serve the membership, and help to strengthen other regions, to hold upcoming All Choir Gatherings outside of California.

The importance of regional gatherings was also a focus of the Board. Ellen Rose, Claire Paul, Kri Schlafer, Marty Mariette, and Maria Culberson, the ad-hoc "Gathering Team," met with Heidi to develop a document describing the support the organization could provide to chapters for planning regional gatherings, including the ability to front funds for down payments on venues.

### **Spotlight on New Chapter Coaching, Then and Now**

Of course, it all began with Kate Munger, "My initial goal was to gather 500 singers in the Bay Area and that was achieved by our 5th anniversary (celebrated with a memorable mountain of tuxedo brownies). To my surprise, the Threshold Choir kept growing..."

Kate's encouragement, support, and guidance birthed many of the close to 100 chapters that had joined Threshold Choir when the Leadership Learning Circle (LLC) formed a Midwifery Team in 2014 to carry on the work. Marilyn Rampley was part of that team, and stayed with it until she officially retired from the work group in 2022. Mentored by Ellen Rose, Marilyn stepped into the role of coaches' coach when Ellen moved on to other projects. She believes she may have worked with close to forty coaches in that capacity, launching eighty chapters.

Charlotte Million from the Mile High Threshold Singers in Denver, CO, wrote the following about coaching new chapters for the October 2015 issue of *Our Voices, Our Song*:

## Coaching from Concept to Chapter

"How do new chapters get started? There's the traditional gleam in someone's eye, of course, and then what? About a year ago [2014], six Threshold Choir directors teamed up to turn a minimal set of steps and instructions into a flexible, repeatable process that serves today's Threshold Choir and the needs we're seeing among those who want to join us in this work. We originally called our project 'Chapter Midwifery', to pinpoint exactly where in the chapter lifecycle we were working, and now we see ourselves more generally as New-Chapter Coaches or Mentors (and, OK, Midwives)..."

"Each coach works with two to six choirs at a time, located across the USA, Western Canada, Australia, the British Isles, and, on our newest frontiers, Europe (Germany) and Asia (Cambodia). We're very happy to recommend and consult with local Threshold Choir workshop presenters, as well.

What exactly do New-Chapter Coaches do? We listen. Each new group is different, and each organizer has different needs. We listen attentively to cues for issues and solutions. We share our experiences, and we're available to hear theirs. We offer guidance and hope. And, most important, we help plant and nurture the Threshold Choir culture and values that sustain us—even across the miles and years."

Robin Hess and Cathy Baird provided this update on the Threshold New Chapter Coaching Team:

"When Marilyn Rampley retired in 2022, the coaching team numbered around six or seven, and we had an organized framework to help us guide developing chapters. Inquirers complete an online form which then goes to a team member who welcomes them in an email and explains the process using media resources that highlight the beauty of our music and the warm relationships that form when we sing together with a shared mission. If the new leader wants to proceed, we connect them with a coach who stays involved through the months or years as they learn about Threshold Choir culture and history, how to gather and train singers, how to develop sustainable shared leadership, and how to let their community know about their bedside singing services.

Each member of the coaching team partners with several new chapters, making sure that each leader understands the benefits and requirements of membership in a non-profit. Leaders learn how to find and use the growing resources on the website, including the bedside curriculum, the repertoire, new and old webinars, promotional ideas, and new singer and leadership development. Coaches help the leader to understand best practices and resources specific to new leaders. We address communication, death and grief, leadership models, member roles, and launch readiness. Coaches can also consult after chapters have launched and when they go through difficult periods or leadership transitions.



*Current Coaching team, picture by Robin Hess*

The current coaching team, Cathy Baird, Deborah Carrithers, Ginny Moreland, Linda Jones, Robin Hess, and Susan Smith, meets monthly to provide updates on our exploring and forming chapters with an opportunity to ask for advice and benefit from the wisdom of the other coaches. Marilyn Rampley guided us to become a leader-full group where all can contribute to launching strong, stable, and sweet-sounding Threshold Choir chapters."

## **2016**

The Board of Directors supporting Threshold Choir in 2016 included: Katharine Rose Kirner, Chair; Nancy Roberts-Brown, Vice-Chair; Leeann Enright, Treasurer; April Boyden, Secretary; Susan Graves, Director; and Cherry Tinker, Director.



By the end of 2016, there were 135 active chapters with 1783 Threshold Choir members around the globe. An astounding 456 new members joined that year, many the result of the KQED story (a San Francisco Bay Area PBS station) that aired on June 10th, 2016, and received more than two million views when it was subsequently posted on YouTube. The beautiful six-minute video contains scenes of Peggy Cadbury, Karen Mooney, and Katharine Kirner singing to a resident at the Zen Hospice Project, the resident's description of receiving the service, and interviews with Kate Munger and the singers. The video is posted on the public homepage of the Threshold Choir website, and is still available for viewing on YouTube.

In 2016, the All Choir Gathering (ACG) was held outside of California for the first time, achieving the Board's goal of making the gathering available for members who may not have attended an ACG before. The Chicago gathering was a success thanks to the collaborative efforts of the team members who produced the event: Claire Paul, Phyllis Wickliff, Lauren Lane

Powell, Linda Jones, Marie Siferd, Barbara Murphy Sanders, Maria Culberson, Kay McCormack, Ann O'Quinn, and Theresa Sapunar, with special thanks to Ellen Rose.



Compassionate Care of California recognized the service provided by Threshold Choir with the Compassionate Care Leadership Award of 2016. Kate let members know that they could feel proud receiving this award for the heartfelt work they are providing in their communities and she expressed her gratitude for application assistance from Board member, Susan Graves.

Thanks to the efforts of Ellen Rose, Cathy Baird and Ryckje Wagner, updates to the website included a new homepage and the additions of new songs and learning tracks.

Some of the Board business that year included a request that communication guidelines be readdressed in response to difficult conversations on the Director's Listserve. The Board Chair, Katharine Kirner, convened a work group of eleven choir members to review communication guidelines based on the questions: is it true? is it kind? is it necessary? does it improve the silence? Katharine also provided a draft statement to make available to chapters who might need suggestions for responding to those who ask for singing at the bedside of a planned death.

As we well know, it takes many hands, and in 2016, Threshold Choir volunteers were active in the following work groups: Midwifery, Development, Outreach, Member Services, Songwriters/Repertoire, Regional Gatherings, Workshops, Media Outreach, Newsletter, Training Resources, and Web Services.

## **2017**

The members of the Board of Directors providing guidance to TC in 2017 were: Katharine Rose Kirner, Chair; Nancy Roberts-Brown, Vice-Chair; Cherry Tinker, Secretary; Leeann Enright, Treasurer; Lana Noel, Director and Linda Jones, Director.

By 2017, over 2100 members were singing for those at the thresholds of life in nearly 200 chapters around the world. The collection of data related to bedside sings had just begun, with just over 100 chapters reporting an average of more than 2000 sings per month.

The All Choir Gathering held in Portland, Oregon, brought nearly 300 members together to teach, to learn, to sing, and to play. Members were welcomed on Friday night with an invitation to join a procession carrying luminaria around the reflecting pool in the lush formal gardens of Portland's Lewis and Clark College. The firefly flicker of candlelight and the sweet sound of soft singing gave a dreamlike quality to the night, a magical start to a memorable gathering.

It was also a year of devastation from wildfires. In Sonoma County, California, twenty-four lives were lost, nearly 100,000 people were evacuated from their homes, and 5,300 homes were destroyed. Threshold Choir responded with compassion. Venus Maher led singing at evacuation shelters with Threshold Choir members from Santa Rosa, Glen Ellen, and Sonoma. The singers encountered rooms with as many as 400 to 500 evacuees, mostly strangers, sleeping on cots crammed tightly together. She said, "Feeling the music was

creating heart-to-heart connections, we sang for hours and didn't want to stop." Venus also spoke of the joy that singing in Spanish brought to the many Spanish speakers in the shelters.

In response to the fires, Kate wasted no time asking choir members to send personal heirlooms for those who lost their homes and possessions. Kate's donation mantra, "Generous, affordable and personally significant" has been my definition of generosity for years now, and Threshold Choir members know generosity! Forty-five boxes arrived from choir members around the world.

With the emotional gift deliveries, a remarkable pattern of serendipity emerged as recipients unwrapped gifts in sealed boxes with no idea what they would find inside. Kate told of the first delivery to a couple who lost their hand built home, their collection of rare and vintage Volkswagens, and all of their possessions. "I chose a box from Connecticut, since I had just been there on the day the fire broke out; it seemed right somehow. Yes, the first item in the box was a lovely Thanksgiving table runner in the exact pumpkin pattern that MaryEllen had just used to make napkins that were now gone. MaryEllen's first tears (the first she had shed since the fire) came when she saw this fabric. As she opened each subsequent packet, read each note that went with it, read the heart filled messages from loving, compassionate strangers, she wept more sweet tears that held the promise of a flood coming at some right moment downstream. There were sun catchers, a beautifully glazed and fired heart, a lovely tiny blue bear made with stitches so small they were barely visible, metal salt and pepper shakers in the shape of fruit and so much more... ". When Kate gave the couple a copy of the CD, *Walking Each Other Home*, she learned that Heidi Dressler had once been a renter in the home they had just lost to the fire.

Angela Morgan, who sings with the Valley of the Moon Threshold Choir and the Sonoma County Threshold Singers, accompanied Kate on some of the deliveries. She told of being present when a couple received a box of ceramic angels after losing the ceramic angels they had been collecting for years following the loss of their son. She also told of seeing the only quilt that was sent end up in the box given to a family that had lost a beloved quilt in the fires.

*Note: The information presented here includes excerpts from Annual Reports, Minutes from monthly Board Meetings, and Our Voice Our Song newsletters, and other postings on the website, with excerpts from interviews with Marilyn Rampley, Robin Hess, and Cathy Baird, and previous interviews for my book, The Songs We Sing.*

## **Threshold Choir History - Part 8 2018-2019**

### **2018**

The hard-working 2018 Board of Directors included Katharine Rose Kirner, Chair; Lana Noel, Vice Chair; Cherry Tinker, Secretary; Linda Jones, Treasurer; and Nancy Roberts-Brown, Member.

By the end of 2018 we were 213 chapters strong with 2450 members singing at bedsides.

**Award for Outstanding Service** - A Threshold Choir Award for Outstanding Service was initiated in 2018, with Ellen Rose the first recipient. While leading the South Bay Threshold Choir in San Jose, and the Peninsula Threshold Choir in Palo Alto, California, Ellen contributed her time, wisdom, patience, and talent to assist in nearly every aspect of the growth and sustainability of the TC organization. She answered members questions, offered assistance to new choirs, established the current chapter coaching program, and so much more. She developed the website, wrote much of its content, and held our hands as we learned to navigate it. She constructed a repertoire program with policies to legally protect our songwriters and ensure their music is treated with integrity. I was honored to receive Ellen's offer to score a song I had written so it could be added to the Threshold repertoire, and I know I'm not the only one who received her kind support with repertoire.

**Data Collection** - Efforts to diversify funding for the choir, the generosity of members and outside donors and the success of the Development Team's campaign for end-of-life giving plans led by Cherry Tinker contributed to improved finances for the choir. With communication a key focus of the board, funds were now available to initiate a project that entailed hiring Jill Schnipke to contact each chapter in North America to ask how the organization could best support their work. Do you remember getting that call from Jill? Her cheerful voice and willingness to listen made the call memorable for me.

Later that year, Jill was hired as the Member Services Coordinator and she began the process of collecting data on bedside sings. With fifty percent of the chapters participating in a six-month trial period, an average of 2,400 bedside sings were reported each month. It was estimated that members provided 5,000 monthly bedside sings for the entire organization, 60,000 for the year.

**2018 All Choir Gathering** - The Boulder Threshold Singers, Mile High Threshold Singers, Moon Over Mountains Threshold Singers and Pikes Peak Threshold Singers collaborated to make the 2018 All Choir Gathering (ACG) in Boulder, Colorado, a rich collection of educational, amusing (who could forget that hootenanny?), and spiritual offerings. The spectacular event drew 282 members together. One of those attendees, Patty Lienweber of the Evergreen Threshold Singers, eloquently summed up her experience in Boulder in *Our Voices, Our Song*: "What a joy to be among these voices and find my voice among them. I received concrete exercises for my mind, inspiring encouragement for my spirit, and joy and tears for my

heart." No one could have predicted that the glorious Boulder, Colorado ACG would be the last (the last to date, that is)



*Attendees of the Elevate All Choir Gathering (Boulder, CO 2018)*

As much as we love our ACGs, only about 8% of members typically attended those gatherings. With the coordination and expense required to accommodate a group of that size, the board decided to begin planning ACGs every other year instead of annually. In 2018, Heidi began making appeals seeking a host chapter, or a coalition of chapters, for a 2020 gathering, but none stepped up. With the onset of COVID and "Stay at Home" mandates in the Spring of 2020, it is fortunate that no gathering was planned for that challenging year.

### **All Choir Gatherings 2007-2018:**

- 2007 Gathering #1 - Bishop's Ranch, Healdsburg, CA
- 2008 Gathering #2 - Bishop's Ranch, Healdsburg, CA
- 2009 Gathering #3 - Bishop's Ranch, Healdsburg, CA
- 2010 Gathering #4 - Bishop's Ranch, Healdsburg, CA
- 2011 Gathering #5 - Bishop's Ranch, Healdsburg, CA
- 2012 Gathering #6 - Bishop's Ranch, Healdsburg, CA
- 2013 Gathering #7 - Bishop's Ranch, Healdsburg, CA
- 2014 Gathering #8 - Presentation Center, Los Gatos, CA
- 2015 Gathering #9 - Presentation Center, Los Gatos, CA
- 2016 Gathering #10 - Techny Towers/Bahai Center, Northbrook, Chicago, IL
- 2017 Gathering #11 - Lewis & Clark College, Portland, OR
- 2018 Gathering #12 - University of Colorado, Boulder, CO

**Regional Gatherings** - Even before it was evident that there would be no ACG in 2020, the board decided to focus resources on regional events to give more members an opportunity to attend. Guidelines and a timeline were created to help chapters with planning and a budget was allocated to assist host chapters with \$300 available for a one-day gathering, and \$600 for two

days or more. A key element of these events would be to foster improved skill-sets that would serve members in this work. As a result, twice as many Regionals were planned in 2019 than in 2018, with several hosted by chapters collaborating with other chapters in the region.



*4th Great Lakes Regional Gathering; photo by Patti Robb*

It was my intention to compile a list of Regional Gathering dates and locations for each year, but after months of research and reaching out to individuals and chapters, I have not been able to gather enough information to come up with complete list. The process did make me appreciate the astonishing number of Regional Gatherings that have taken place and continue to take place.

## **2019**

The Threshold Choir Board of Directors members doing the heavy lifting for our choir in 2019 were: Lana Noel, Chair; Nancy Roberts-Brown, Vice Chair; Cherry Tinker, Secretary; Linda Jones, Treasurer; and Katharine Kirner, Past Chair.

In the annual report, Lana Noel wrote this: "One of the more significant years in Threshold Choir history, 2019 was filled with major change, growing pains and new beginnings."

**Chapter Agreements** - 2019 was the year of the Chapter Agreements. With Threshold Choir chapters spread across the U.S., and the world, compliance with the federal and state laws that govern 501(c)3 nonprofits is complicated. When the board received legal advice that the relationship between the organization and the chapters had to be formalized with Chapter Agreements, they recognized that we would need different agreements for Affiliated Chapters (most TC chapters are in this category), Independent Chapters (chapters that have established their own 501(c)3 nonprofit organization), and International Chapters.

One of the changes Chapter Agreements addressed was the requirement for Affiliated Chapters to authorize the home office to handle all funds received. By law, the mother organization is responsible for all bank accounts and general accounting tasks such as donations, disbursement of funds, processing reimbursements, record keeping, audits, and tax reporting. This was a major shift from how we had been operating, and not an easy transition for many of our chapters.

Membership dropped from 236 chapters in October of 2019 (when agreements were sent to chapters in the U.S.), to 201 chapters at the end of December (when signed Affiliated and Independent Chapter Agreements were due), with thirty-four new chapters receiving coaching in preparation for future launch. International Agreements would be another whole ball of wax, those agreements were postponed a year.

Amid the turmoil that always accompanies change, this message from Executive Director, Heidi Dressler, appeared in *Our Voices, Our Song*: "We ask, no matter where you or your chapter falls on this continuum, that you remain open to this next stage in our development. This undertaking is essential to guarantee Threshold Choir's sustainability."

As we recently learned, our Fiscal Sponsorship model needs to be tweaked once again to keep us in compliance. I know I am not alone in feeling deep appreciation for the board members, staff and Executive Directors who have been tasked with shepherding the changes needed to keep Threshold Choir on track, no matter how complex and upending those changes may be.

**Curriculum** - The completion of the Curriculum Project produced by Deborah Carrithers, with assistance from Judy Ball, Judy's husband Lauren, and Robin Hess, was heralded as a legacy project for TC in 2019. Although insightful training materials had been developed by chapter leaders over the years, including the detailed manual assembled by Robin Rose and the bedside training offered by Marti Mariette that I found so very insightful, prior to this project, there was no common Threshold Choir curriculum. The new video curriculum would be posted on the website for access by all, and members of chapters with signed Chapter Agreements that were received by the 12/31/2019 deadline were the first to receive the link to the trainings.

### **Diversity Work Group**

A shockwave reverberated through the organization when a member of our choir family spoke up about a discussion within TC that was offensive to her. In response, Edith Lewis offered her services chairing a Threshold Choir Diversity Curriculum work group. An Emerita Professor of Social Work and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan who studied, taught and led organizations in the field of diversity for more than 30 years, Edie is also a member of the Threshold Singers of Ann Arbor and Co-Director of the Oaxaca Canta Threshold Singers in Oaxaca, Mexico. When the call went out to recruit members for the work group, the response from our caring membership was tremendous.

The Diversity and Inclusion Task Force was established in the Fall of 2019 with these goals:

- Explore and understand the nature and range of barriers that stand in the way of the Threshold Choir being a genuinely diverse organization;
- Develop a collection of resources, available on line as a supplement to the Curriculum, that can be used by Threshold Choir members, chapters, leadership teams and the Board of Directors to lead their exploration of these barriers;
- Support personal and organizational actions that will overcome or mitigate the impact of these barriers;
- Ensure that all people, regardless of gender identity/gender expression, economic class, physical/mental ability, race/ethnicity, national origin, and geographical differences have

the opportunity to authentically experience the “kindness made audible” that is the trademark of the Threshold Choir.

Past Zoom presentations on diversity and the curriculum developed by The Threshold Choir International Diversity and Inclusion Task Force are available to members on our website under "Resources," and "Curriculum," respectively. The task force posted this encouragement to explore the information provided and discuss it with members of your chapter:

*"This is an invitation to become more. More compassionate, more understanding, more open-hearted. To grow, to learn, to savor the differences that make us each a unique part of a beautiful whole."*

### **A Passing of Note**



It is always sad when we lose one of our own, and on January 25, 2019, Lauren Lane Powell, beloved member of the Bloomington Threshold Choir, passed to the other side. During her seven-year cancer journey, she shared her spirited approach to chemo therapy and to facing death. She also contributed thirty-six songs to the TC repertoire, and her helpful singing tips, "Vocally Yours," were a regular feature in our member newsletter from August 2015 to November 2018. Her voice lesson videos are posted on the TC website at "Resources/Music," and videos of her inspirational singing and dancing response to cancer treatment and impending

death can be viewed on YouTube at: [Lauren Lane Powell, Chemo Therapy](#); [Lauren Lane Powell, Singing and Chemo](#); [Lauren Lane Powell, Holy Shift, Dancing with Death](#)

To learn more about past members, visit the [In Loving Memory page](#) on the website, where the Threshold Choir honors the memories of those who have died.

*Note: The information presented here includes excerpts from Annual Reports, Minutes from monthly Board Meetings and stories and photos from Our Voice, Our Song newsletters.*

## **Threshold Choir History - Part 9 2020 -2021**

### **2020**

The members of the Board of Directors guiding the organization during this year of reimagining Threshold Choir service were: Lana Noel, Board Chair; Cherry Tinker, Board Secretary; Jan Booth, Interim Treasurer; Nancy Roberts-Brown, Director; and Donna Inglis, Director.

### **COVID**

When the unthinkable occurred in March of 2020, everything changed. People around us were dying, gatherings were banned and singing together became a dangerous activity. Threshold Choir managed to find resourceful means to stay connected. The board, Executive Director, Heidi Dressler, Member Services Manager, Jill Schnipke and members of task groups and committees did what they could to offer support to members using Zoom to connect, sustain and deliver useful content. With instruction shared by tech-savvy choir members, chapters began meeting regularly on Zoom for practices, socializing and check-ins. For those of us struggling with isolation during the lockdown, those Zoom sessions were a vital lifeline.

A full menu of Zoom programming was offered during this time; vocal coaching, singing in other languages, songwriting, diversity, equity and inclusion, death and dying, grief, self-care and technology, and there were singing parties with Melanie DeMore, Karen Drucker and singer/songwriters from within our choir and from the greater community. The Zoom education offered during that time, and beyond, is available on the website at Resources/Past Zoom Presentations.

This also proved to be an ideal time for members to explore the new online curriculum and Deborah Carrithers generously facilitated interactive online trainings. Cynthia Dyer reported that Zoom practices of the Long Bay TS, in South Carolina, included journeying through the new TC curriculum together and singing along with the vocal series from Lauren Lane Powell posted on the website, as well as learning new songs in the repertoire.

Heidi initiated the Sunday Sings to keep us connected and practicing song leading skills. Mary Dennison of Pure Joy TS, in BC, Canada, described how much those sessions meant to her, "Sunday Sing-Alongs are one of the highlights of my week during this 'Spring Time of Isolation'... Sharing the beautiful Threshold songs and seeing all those lovely, smiling faces is a soothing balm for the soul..."

Ellen Rose continued working on repertoire additions, and the board asked staff to contact songwriters to request permission to record songs to send to clients and clients' families while bedside singing was not possible. Codes were added to the repertoire indicating which songs we had permission to record and share, which song recordings would need to be approved by the songwriter before being sent to clients and which songs songwriters did not want recorded.

The board also introduced monthly "Wisdom Circles" seeking input from leaders in the TC community to help gain clarity on how we might evolve within these changing and uncertain times. Thought-provoking questions were discussed like, "If we could not sing at the bedside, how might we reimagine our gifts being expressed in our communities?"

The newsletter helped members keep informed about available resources and how other chapters were coping with the cessation of in-person practices and services. There were regular submissions from the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force, invitations to join other chapters' Zoom practices, tips for using Zoom and news from chapters from around the world. Hazel Hodgkin let us know that the Cadence Singers in Auckland, New Zealand, were back to singing at bedsides in mid-June of 2020 thanks to her island nation's closed borders and isolation of transmissions.

## **Virtual Songbaths**

As we know too well, Zoom does have shortcomings. One of our chapters came up with an innovative idea to use that technology to deliver the kind of intimacy usually only accomplished at bedsides. The Santa Cruz Threshold Singers (SCTS) had been offering monthly in-person community songbaths for eight years when COVID shut that down. Marti Mariette didn't want to abandon that offering, "We developed a loyal following at our in-person song baths whom we wanted to continue supporting with our songs," she explained. To keep chapter members engaged and "to return us to service work with our voices," Marti initiated Zoom songbath sessions with her local chapter from June to October 2020 that proved to be comforting and useful for "getting our feet wet in the shallow end of online singing and learning how to use zoom."

"In October, we did a songbath Zoom specifically for Threshold Choir and had something like 100 devices connected for it." After that, Marti realized they could have a bigger impact by inviting more people to join their mailing list for the songbaths. "It grew and ebbed and grew, sometimes we'd have 40, sometimes up to 100. It was a good feeling to offer, participate and receive feedback that helped so many people." In a choir of 42, half of Santa Cruz TS singers participated as singers in the online songbaths with a focus on creating a sense of intimacy, not performance. Whether smoothly shifting from singer to singer or "passing the song" with different singers taking verses of the same song, the technology flowed gracefully, with the care and practice invested in these Zoom sessions evident.

Santa Cruz extended other Zoom invitations, "a Valentine's Day sing, an International Peace Day sing, yearly New Year's Eve parties that included singing and dancing and lots of getting to know each other Zooms. We even led a local vocal coach class. Anything to keep us [connected] as a community and feel we were still valued singing in our community." Marti shared what she learned about hosting Zoom events by offering a "How to do a Zoom Songbath" class to TC members. The chapter continued monthly online songbaths for over three years. At the end of December 2023, their focus returned to in-person songbaths, which they continue to offer once or twice a month in their community. Marti said choir members also gather for a monthly lunch-hour sing in their local hospital chapel where the focus is, "singing prayers for ourselves, for everyone in the hospital and for the greater world."

## **COVID Losses**

While the efforts to keep chapters and the organization thriving and supported during this dark time are inspiring, it was a difficult time for most of us. Members and loved ones of members lost their lives. Many lost livelihoods. Grief was widespread, none were untouched by the pandemic. Things looked bleak as "Stay-at-Home" orders were extended month after month

while we pinned our hopes on the promise of a vaccine that would turn things around and make it possible to socialize and sing together again. As COVID knowledge increased and public policy evolved, Threshold Choir policies continued to change.

With Membership renewals dropping by approximately 60 per month as a result of COVID, the board pursued cost cuts including reduced staff hours. In response to reduced membership dues, the development committee adopted the messaging: “Threshold Choir is worth protecting.”

The obstacles to bedside singing didn't stop our dedicated members. We managed to provide 3008 COVID sings in 2020, singing for patients via Zoom, telephone, recordings, and outside facility windows to deliver comforting song.

### **Gender Diversity**

As Threshold Choir continued adapting to new realities, in November, 2020, the Board of Directors welcomed David Grube as the first male board member. David and his wife, Lynn, joined Heart of the Valley TS in Corvallis, Oregon, in 2017. A retired MD, prior to the COVID lockdown, David traveled the country training medical professionals in options available in palliative and hospice care, including Medical Aid in Dying. David's level of expertise and caring were invaluable additions in this critical time in TC history.



*David R. Grube with Heart of the Valley TS. (Our Voices, Our Song November 2020)*

## 2021

The board members who worked diligently for the benefit of Threshold Choir in 2021 included Lana Noel, Chair; Nancy Roberts-Brown, Secretary; Jan Booth, Treasurer; Donna Inglis, Director; and David Grube, MD, Director.

As a working board, our Board of Directors creates and writes policies, understands the legal responsibilities of a 501(c)(3), and oversees all aspects of the organization to sustain its mission. As long as COVID-19 remained a threat, setting COVID policies and changing the policies as conditions changed was part of the board's responsibilities. Board member, Dr. David Grube, helped keep our COVID policies up to date with informed recommendations.

Committees supporting the priorities of the organization in 2021 included the Diversity, Outreach, Development Committees, Chapter Coaching and Bedside Training. A Sounding Board comprised of regional representatives was formed to bring members' ideas and input into programs and policies and a new Repertoire Committee was formed. Through the concerted efforts of the board, staff and committees, a wealth of online events and educational offerings continued to be offered to keep us focused and connected while the pandemic persisted.

Our Member Services Manager, Jill Schnipke, did not renew her contract when it expired in May. She wanted the membership to know, "It has been an immense pleasure, joy, honor, a real *soul mission*, for me to be here to work with all of you." Her membership in the Mile High chapter in Denver, Colorado, will keep her connected to the mission. Priscilla Green, our capable Office Manager, who had been working with Threshold on contract, was hired as an Administrative Assistant in June of 2021.

### **COVID's Continued Impacts**

According to the CDC COVID-19 Timeline, the pandemic death toll in the U.S. doubled in 2021, increasing from 400,000 COVID deaths in January to over 800,000 deaths by mid-December, with a total of 15 million deaths worldwide.

When "Stay at Home" mandates were lifted in this second year of COVID-19, and we could finally meet together outdoors, masks and distancing were required. Against all odds, we kept singing, learning to sing wearing masks. Although vaccines became available for seniors at the end of February, 2021, the national supply was not adequate for the general public (those over 16 years old) until the end of May. Our hopes that the vaccine would allow a return to bedside singing were dashed by new variants and spikes in infections in the winter and summer, and again in December of 2021. Requirements fluctuated with conditions. The requirement that TC members show proof of vaccination was dropped when member input generated the awareness that some within our community made a conscious choice not to vaccinate, or had medical conditions that prevented vaccination. Chapters were requested to record only the number of members vaccinated and unvaccinated in monthly reports.

Many chapters took time off during the prolonged pandemic, and some members chose not to renew their memberships until we could sing at bedsides again. Heidi reported that nearly 1300 memberships had been lost since the outbreak began. Although generous contributions received during 2021 showed how much Threshold Choir is valued by its members, with membership down, a predictable revenue stream was needed for programs and planning. The board agreed to

establish a minimum annual membership fee of \$60 with a scholarship plan that would enable all to pay the annual dues.

### **Zoom Expands Our Reach**

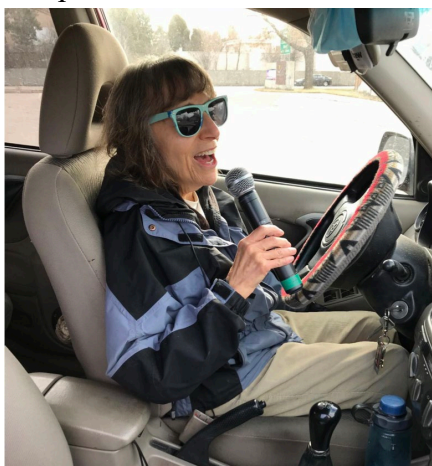
Ever resourceful and resilient, TC chapters found new and creative work-arounds to sing together using Zoom, and other technology, with some chapters taking advantage of the elimination of the distance obstacle to invite others to join their Zoom practices and events.

Leslie Black of Cache Valley TS told how the Salt Lake Valley, Cache Valley (Logan) and Ogden Threshold Singers in Northern Utah joined together to send an invitation to Kate Munger to ZOOM with them. "Kate graciously accepted our invitation and led us through a most magnificent evening rehearsal. Her warmth, wisdom, personal stories and singing were very inspirational to us all. She is like a breath of fresh air in these COVID times, bringing renewed purpose, understanding and encouragement."

A Zoom collaboration assisted the Worland TS in Wyoming overcome a rocky start. The chapter was new to Threshold when COVID hit. Not comfortable with the idea of conducting rehearsals on Zoom, they took a break to wait until in-person rehearsals and bedside singing resumed. When that didn't happen, they disbanded. That was before Rachel Davis of the Diablo Valley TS in the San Francisco Bay Area reached out and invited them to a combined Zoom rehearsal. With Jill Schnipke's assistance, and the Visitation & Exchange spreadsheet, the more experienced chapter connected with the flummoxed Wyoming chapter 1,100 miles away. In the April 2021 edition of "Our Voices, Our Song," the two chapters reported that following their first fulfilling and beneficial collaborative Zoom rehearsal in August 2020, the chapters were in their ninth month of joint monthly rehearsals on Zoom.

### **Technology Triumphs**

Members of the Mile High TS in Denver, Colorado reached beyond the limitations of Zoom with an innovative new method to sing together while quarantined. Inspired by an article in the New York Times, chapter member Cheryl Stearns, and her husband Carl Coffman, used wireless microphones and an FM transmitter to connect singers. In January of 2021, members were



invited to park their cars in a Unitarian Universalist church parking lot in central Denver with hoods pointing inward and sing into the wireless mics provided. With some fine tuning, Carl's expertise, and sanitary wipes for the equipment, those participating in the successful test run "enjoyed the delicious thrill of singing together unmasked in pandemic safety," according to Mile High TS director, Charlotte Million. "This is something that helps us re-experience the *frisson* we felt when we first heard Threshold Choir music," she said. The shortcomings of Zoom singing couldn't stop these determined choir members from singing together.

*Mile High Threshold Singer Karla Horowitz happily harmonizes in her car with other singers on the radio.  
Photo by Karen Rutledge*

"Happy, happy, happy!! Grateful, grateful, grateful!!" is how Susan Smith, Director of the Tallahassee Area Threshold Singers described how she felt hearing her chapter sing together in harmony after more than 14 months of Zoom singing. She told of an emotional meeting in May of 2021, when ten members sang together on a screened-in porch, masked and distanced, with nine members tuned in on Zoom, and a Yeti microphone set on omnidirectional mode. The mic enabled attendees to clearly hear the singers and their harmonies. Susan explained, "The perfect song was chosen for the momentous occasion, 'All to Love' by Erice Shepard and Margaret Richey." They planned to rotate in-person and Zoom participants for future meetings.

### **Finding Solace in our Songs**

Katharine Rose Kirner's suggestion to those of us who struggled to find our way during those challenging times was to turn to the repertoire. She asked, "What if the times allow us to reorient and hold these songs as nourishment for ourselves?" Kate has often spoken of how these songs offer guidance.

We will turn to the repertoire and to insights about the history of our repertoire and the Repertoire Committee from Ellen Rose and Annie Garretson in the next installment of the Threshold Choir History.

*Note: The information presented here includes a submission from Marti Mariette and excerpts from Annual Reports, minutes from monthly Board Meetings, and Our Voice, Our Song newsletters archived on the website.*

## Threshold Choir History - Part 10 The Repertoire, A Gift for Singers and Those Receiving the Songs

We have Kate Munger to thank for planting the seed that has grown to be an extraordinary collection of songs that speak to our hearts and heal the world. "Guide Me," written in 2000, was the first of hundreds of songs Kate would write for Threshold Choir. Her gift for conveying compelling messages of kindness and support with few words and beautiful melodies and harmonies has touched and inspired us. For many of us, Kate's advice, "If the songs give you a shiver, Threshold is for you," was the only introduction we needed to know this service was right for us.

Some years back, Kate wrote this description of the songs we sing at bedside:

*I'd like to speak about this body of songs. First, almost all have been written by amateurs, those who do it for love, many have come from an experience at a bedside where the exactly perfect song hadn't been written yet.*

- *Without really ever planning, we've collectively created a new choral form, a tribal music for folks that know we will all die and who rely on that truth to create meaning in our lives.*
- *There are almost 330 songs in our active repertoire. Our songs are direct, yet gentle, seeking to welcome the dying person wherever they are in their journey and to walk beside them, gently, step by step.*
- *They are repetitive, like most sacred music, letting the meaning soak in naturally, in time and out of time.*
- *They grow naturally, like a tree, from deep roots, adding branches and leaves and voices and lines of harmony as they blossom.*
- *They can be sung by one person alone and are enhanced by harmony and voices in magical blend. Each entering voice's part is a new compelling tune, adding dimension, depth and meaning to the song.*
- *They are a vehicle for deepening presence, compassion and gentleness at the bedside.*
- *They serve the singer and the sung to and all gathered at the bedside. Often families and caregivers continue to sing to their loved one long after we're gone.*
- *Our songs bypass the confusion of culture and current events. They respond to the cycles of life and death that guide us through our human lives.*
- *They are not dirges. They are often decidedly not sad. They serve to normalize and honor death in a culture that is so terrified of death that it can often not even say the word and has forgotten that death is a sacred unfolding of this precious life.*
- *The creative joy it is to write one of these songs is unspeakably profound. To know that your poetry, images, melody and harmonies are helping someone find their path and their peace is the greatest gift.*

*I'm going to tell you a secret: our songs can relieve pain.*

② IF NOT LOVE Helen Greenspan © 6-00

①  
② If not love, what are we here for?  
If not love, what are we here for?

Kate explained how the repertoire blossomed and began to grow this way: "Helen Greenspan's song, 'If Not Love,' arrived in June of 2000 and amplified the elegant simplicity and purpose that typify our songs. It seemed like that song started the waterfall of many new songs from Sherrin Loyd, Katharine Osburn, Devra Wolf, Jody Healy, Rebecca Cone, Ilana Cotton, Susan Abbot, and others."

When I joined the choir in 2010, each and every song in our expanding collection of bedside music was scored manually by Kate, with lyrics written in her meticulous cursive. This monumental offering, available only to Threshold Choir, is considered a sacred manuscript by those of us fortunate enough to have the original songbooks in our possession.

⑩ ANOTHER WORLD Arundhati Roy / Kate Munger © 9-2013

①  
②  
A-nother world is not only possible — she is on her way. On a  
quiet day I can hear her breathing. A-

⑪ BLESS YOU FOR BEING Kate Munger © 9-2013

①  
②  
For you, for the rest of your life, my beloved, Bless you for being. For

Rhea Schnurman developed the first web-based repertoire with a website linked to the first Threshold Choir website that was created by Marilyn Chartrand. Choir members could access the dozens of songs she notated and posted on the site. Rhea also created indexes that helped us navigate our massive songbooks, where songs had been added and numbered chronologically as the music emerged.

Recognizing that it was becoming impractical to distribute and update a growing collection of songs on paper to an ever increasing and geographically dispersed membership, in 2011, Kate

convened a team to begin creating a single expanded website. This would be the official home for the repertoire, member resources, tutorial information, choir locations, contacts, communications, our new logo, and so much more. Cathy Baird and Ellen Rose led the design effort, with Ellen shepherding the process of adding repertoire to the website.

Ellen worked with Kate, Carol Lynn, Claire Paul, and many others who offered input and feedback to develop a uniform template for Threshold Choir's song notations, define and document legal aspects for the choir's use of songs (a process that Cindy Harris had begun), and gather translations, recordings, and songwriter contacts and permissions.



When Kay Caldwell took the initiative to publish a songbook of printed music, Ellen Rose led the effort to obtain contacts and legal permissions from songwriters and score the 147 songs that were chapter favorites and songs that Kate felt had the power to touch hearts. The *Threshold Choir Songbook, Highlights from the First Fifteen Years 2000-2015* became available to members in 2015 and has been our go-to music book ever since. Many thanks to Kay and all who provided support to produce this resource.

Annie Garretson is a member of the talented team that works to hone the Threshold Choir repertoire and make it accessible to all of us. She kindly agreed to provide her take on the work of the Repertoire Committee and to bring us up to date on the progress they have made.

#### **From Annie Garretson:**

I've been working on repertoire development since at least 2013, joining shortly after the original committee had been at it for a while. That group included Ellen Rose (who was at the helm for more than a decade), Kate Munger, Sherrin Loyd, Marilyn Power Scott, Sue Ribaud, Caryatis Cardea, Claire Paul, Carol Lynn, Barb Malloy, Cathy Baird, Ryckje Wagner, Kay Caldwell, and Cindy Harris. If there were other team members I've missed, I apologize for not having a record of them.

In late 2020, Heidi Dressler asked if I would be interested in examining repertoire issues and determine how to move forward with them. She envisioned this as a "Legacy Project," which was a perfect description. In the spring of 2021, we assembled a cadre of songwriters and a handful of interested members and began by sending out a survey asking what was working well, what could be further developed, and what was needed. The team consisted of Kate Munger, Penelope Salinger, Katharine Rose Kirner, Peggy Cadbury, Karen Mooney, Rachel Davis, Loretta Burdeaux, Marcia Bernstein, and me. Heidi was present at meetings observing and answering questions until her death in October of 2023. Carrie Andrews took on Heidi's role and Diane McGrew has joined the team. Kate left the group in March 2025.

When our current work group formed, we chose the name "Threshold Choir Repertoire Design and Preservation Team," which essentially represented our goals. We set about identifying the songs that were most often sung, then used that data to determine which of those still needed to have vocal learning files added to their website song pages. We also focused on adding song stories, songwriter profiles, and category recommendations for all songs in the repertoire.

Additionally, we refined some policies, including limiting song submissions to Threshold Choir composers.

I want to acknowledge members of our “Fresh Ears” team, past and present, whose job has been to listen to submitted song recordings and compare them with its notation to see if they match: Liz Stanton, Holly Ota, Diane McGrew, Shasta Martinuk, Loretta Burdeaux, Margaret Richey, Penelope Salinger, Peggy Cadbury, and myself.

Of course, we’ve also had help from singers who recorded parts for our vocal learning files. Without them we couldn’t have expanded the collection as far as we have to date. Some of them are already mentioned, but I’m afraid I’d overlook contributors if I try to name them all, so I’ll just say a huge thank you, and ask forgiveness for not listing everyone who contributed.

The *Rest Easy* album’s songs were determined by a survey we sent to choirs asking for their most frequently sung bedside songs. The top song on that list was “Rest Easy,” making the album title an easy call. I contacted the composers to determine what recording of their song they wanted to use. As I collected the tracks, I sent them to sound engineer Paul Schwotzer in Colorado Springs. Using his digital mastery, he leveled the song volume for each song so that a listener wouldn’t have to adjust their listening level between tracks, and occasionally did some additional sound modifications to create the best listening experience. I worked on the album layout for Bandcamp, using Peggy Cadbury’s beautiful watercolor. Chelsea Weiss, a graphic designer, created the cover layout featuring Peggy’s artwork. The entire project was free for us to produce as Paul waived his fee, Peggy gave us the artwork, Chelsea volunteered her time, and well, so did I. Only one professional songwriter asked for a very small cut of our proceeds. As of mid-August, purchases of the collection total 145, and 12 individual tracks have been sold. Essentially, we sell just under an album a day. It’s nice to know we have an option to share our music with people who need it when we can’t make it to bedsides, and having a little funding come to the organization is a nice bonus.



Beyond working on the album, the team has been instrumental in helping to bring the Silver Jubilee Zoom offerings to members everywhere. Due to our involvement in these extra projects, we put a moratorium on song submissions for this year. While we have more work to do for remaining celebrations before the year ends, we have just begun to shift gears in anticipation of the new year, potential song submissions, and how to make the repertoire most useful and accessible for all members.

To get a handle on those challenges and help identify key issues, the team recently participated in the first half of a defining process called “Six Thinking Hats.” Katharine Rose Kirner brought the concept to us, and Mary Vargas of the San Francisco choir facilitated the meeting. The concept challenged us to identify both the benefits and challenges related to repertoire issues and help us find our way forward. We will use this information to guide our future steps.

I have been so deeply grateful to share this work with such a dedicated and delightful group. They have become friends I care deeply about, and I feel it’s reciprocated back to me and among

all of the members. These people are committed, deeply caring, responsive, wholly capable, and professional. They have always understood the gravity of being responsible for this treasured, unparalleled musical collection. It is both the vehicle for our service and the foundation for our interconnectedness. I think I speak for the entire team when I say we will do the best we can to continue to design and preserve the precious collection that provides the musical expression required as we comfort people at all of life's thresholds.

Annie Garretson 8/18/25

Team member, Rachel Davis, supplied this data:

- There are about 600 songs in the repertoire currently.
- Since 2020, sound files for a total of 166 songs have been added, some with multiple vocal learning files for parts recorded separately. This includes:
  - adding sound files to 77 existing songs that never had them before;
  - updating poor or incorrect sound files for 51 songs;
  - adding sound files for 38 new songs.
- Also since 2020, there have been a total of 221 song stories added thanks to Olga Michael's work reaching out to songwriters. This includes:
  - adding song stories to 172 existing songs that never had any before;
  - updating song stories for 20 songs;
  - adding song stories for 29 new songs.

Note: The information presented here includes Annie Garretson's submission, and input from Ellen Rose and Rachel Davis. It also includes material that Kate Munger wrote about the repertoire that was published in "Our Voices, Our Song" newsletters archived on the website.

The image shows two staves of handwritten musical notation on a blue background. The top staff is titled "SINGING THIS SONG" and "Kate Munger © 7.13 For Justice". It features a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single line. Below the staff, the lyrics "Singing this song blesses me" and "Singing with you blesses us" are written in cursive. The bottom staff is titled "SINGING THIS SONG (harmonies)" and "Kate Munger © 9.13". It features a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a 3/4 time signature. The harmony is written on a single line. Below the staff, the lyrics "Singing this song blesses me" and "Singing with (for) you blesses us" are written in cursive. The lyrics "My heart is searching for your heart. Your heart is letting me find you." are written below both staves.

## Threshold Choir History – Part 11 2022-2024

### 2022

The members of the Board of Directors guiding the organization in 2022 included: Jan Booth & Nancy Roberts-Brown, Co-Chairs; Aly Lynch, Secretary; Betty Szatkowski, Treasurer; David Grube, Member; Karen Hendrickson, Member

The Board's priorities that year were Chapter & Member Development, a Membership Task Force reviewing membership expectations and processes, Leadership Succession, Website development, and—as always—Financial Stability.

Our forward-thinking Board explained that engaging in Leadership Succession planning for our Executive Director was not in response to a plan for Heidi's retirement, but preparation for a time when she does wish to retire. They explored different leadership models, discussed various ways of restructuring the work that Heidi did, and projected the costs of expanding leadership.

### Practicing Resourcefulness

In the third year of the pandemic, COVID deaths decreased while infections increased dramatically with the onset of the Omicron variant. Even with the pandemic still very much with us, most choirs managed to sing together in 2022. We provided over 2,348 COVID sings using phone, Zoom and in-person singing while distanced, masked and/or outdoors. We also reached over 10,000 with song baths, community sings and memorial services.

When the CDC dropped the mask mandate in the US, Threshold Choir followed suit, recommending N95 masks when singing together inside and wherever local laws or facilities required masking. With vaccination considered the most important protection against serious illness and death, the Threshold Choir COVID Policy put in place on August 15, 2022, required vaccination for TC participation.



*Members of the Santa Barbara TS - Penelope Salinger, Judy Nason and Gloria Liggert - provide a COVID sing from outside an open window. (Photo by Linda Ann Hance)*

Heidi reported that the drop in membership renewals as a result of the pandemic continued but 2022 brought an increase in new members and requests to form new chapters. In February, Cathy Baird shared that there were 30 chapters outside the U.S.: 14 in Canada, 8 in Australia and New Zealand, 6 in Europe and the UK, and 2 in Mexico and Central America, with more coming onboard. We closed the year with 2,086 members and 176 active chapters.

TCI Zoom classes continued with more than 80 offerings throughout the year. Sunday Sing! hosted by Heidi met every Sunday, and classes included Hospice, MAiD, Diversity, Jump Start Your Chapter, Sight-Singing, Presence, Grief, End of Life Planning, Death Doulas, Ceremony & Ritual, Melanie DeMore, Karen Drucker and a Death Café every other month.

### **Nurturing Presence**

Presence was one of the topics explored in the wide-ranging educational offerings that year. In the February issue of *Our Voices, Our Song*, Nancy Roberts-Brown had this to say about presence in bedside singing: "I believe we need to specifically identify *presence* as one of the qualities we bring to the bedside. We *know* it is there. We *feel* it is there. And now – we need to name it, nurture it, include its cultivation in our training, practice it in our rehearsals." Nancy's West Seattle Threshold chapter deepened their collective understanding of the concept with a discussion of the meaning of presence followed by each member sharing their feelings about the concept.

The importance of presence was further examined in the July 2022 issue of our newsletter in a piece written by Linda Jones from the Grand Rapids, Michigan TC. She included this quote from Enneagram teacher, Russ Hudson: "For me, presence is a grace offered in each moment. It allows whatever I am feeling to be transmuted into something useful, for myself, for the situation I may be in, and perhaps for some greater good."

### **Committees**

Work on a new website continued, as did the work of the Development, Diversity, Outreach and Communications, Sounding Board, Repertoire, and Coaching committees.

Marilyn Rampley retired from the Coaching Committee in 2022, leaving a team of capable coaches to carry on with a framework and timeline in place for the process of bringing on new leaders and chapters. Kate Munger's heartfelt tribute to Marilyn and her service included this excerpt: "She gracefully shepherded not only the new leaders but also the mentors she trained to walk with those new leaders every step of the way. I am in awe of her skill, her heart and her gentle soul. I am in deep gratitude for her gifts to the Threshold Choir and to me personally."



In her message to members about her experience guiding the coaching team, Marilyn wrote: "From London to Penguin, Stockholm to Bangalore, Reno to New Orleans and Adelaide to Saskatoon, new chapters of TCI have arisen. What fun it's been to be the midwives of their birthing process. Through the last nine years twenty-one coaches have guided forming chapters, sharing with them the culture and practices of Threshold Choir International." She also thanked Kate, Ellen Rose and all who have provided coaching and support for new leaders and chapters.

### **2023**

The 2023 Board of Directors attending to the business of the organization in a time of transition included: Jan Booth & Nancy Roberts-Brown, Co-Chairs; Aly Lynch, Secretary; Betty Szatkowski, Treasurer; Karen Hendrickson, Member; Sudie Pollock, Member; and Bridget Baker, Member.

Members reported reaching over 15,000 with bedside sings and community songbaths in 2023.

## **A Loss and Transition**

The succession planning the Board began in 2022 was going full steam in 2023. In September, they voted to divide the Executive Director's position into two part-time positions: one with executive and administrative responsibilities, and one with responsibilities for member and chapter development. Priscilla Green's valuable role as part-time Administrative Assistant would not change. Recognizing the need to spread the workload and increase staff for coverage for absences, the Board chose to move forward with three part-time staff positions.

On October 23, 2023, following bedside singing by several dear Threshold Choir friends, Heidi Dressler died peacefully with her son by her side. Our first and only Executive Director held that critical position for twelve years, providing strong and steady leadership and financial skills through our growing pains and over the COVID years. She worked diligently to keep the organization connected during that difficult time through classes, workshops, and gatherings offered online along with the Sunday Sings she led on Zoom for four years. Her legacy was honored with a Zoom gathering on November 4, 2023. A donation was given to Planned Parenthood in honor of Heidi.

Following Heidi's death, Leeann Enright agreed to step into the role of Interim Executive Director until the position could be permanently filled. A Search Committee working to recruit an ED and a Member and Chapter Development Director began meeting weekly. Much gratitude was expressed for Priscilla Green's assistance during the transition.

## **Committee Reports December 2023:**

**Development Committee:** Reported their work on the annual appeal takes place in the last six weeks of the year. The impact, vision and work of TC was the focus of the public appeal in 2023. The prior year, over \$50,000 was received as a result of the year-end appeal.

**Coaching Committee:** Cathy Baird reported that the seven-member committee assisted in the launch of eleven chapters during the year and that an inquiry was received from the continent of Africa for first time. She also reported that a second university chapter launched, this one at a medical school.

**Outreach Committee:** Reported that they continued to spread the word about the Threshold Choir and its mission, promoting new chapters, new singers and new partnerships and affiliations.

**Repertoire Committee:** The Repertoire Committee pointed out that the committee was a legacy project of Heidi Dressler. Annie Garretson reported that the talented committee members have worked diligently on projects to improve permissions, song scores and vocal learning files and parts, and completed the transition of our music from the old website to new platform. Three members of the team have mastered skills for posting data on website so no extra financial cost is required for repertoire additions. There are currently 578 songs in the repertoire, 120 vocal learning files, 120 song stories and 27 songwriter profiles.

**Sounding Board Committee:** Serving as a representative body for two way communication between membership and Board of Directors, the Sounding Board outreach to members and chapter leaders provided feedback that helped shape policy changes, Zoom class content, the membership fee structure and priorities for the organization.

**Waking up to Diversity Council:** Started in 2021, the council grew from the TCI Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force begun in 2019. The council's work in 2023 involved writing more curriculum and responding to member concerns, Deep Dive zoom discussions, a BIPOC caucus, curriculum learning

groups and teaching videos on Singing in Spanish, Arabic, Hebrew, and Hymns and Spirituals. The council also explored singing songs from many cultures without appropriation.

Additionally, the Finance, Fundraising and Personnel Committees were also hard at work behind the scenes. As a point of information, committees fall under the direction of the Board, as do Task Forces assembled to complete a specific project.

Our new website had a rocky launch at the end of 2023. Our able website committee watched over the development of the website and the integration of the complicated multi-level needs of our organization.

## **2024**

The following members of the TC Board kept us moving forward in 2024: Bridget Baker & Glenda Guinn-Gilles, Co-Chairs; Natasha Phillips, Treasurer; Sudie Pollock, Secretary; Jan Booth, Member; Caitie Deranek-Stewart, Member; CJ Robinson, Member.

With COVID restrictions mostly in the rearview mirror, Threshold Choir chapters reported that over 23,000 people received our offering of "kindness made audible" in 2024.

## **A Year of Changes**

Interim Executive Director, Leeann Enright, announced that the position of Director, Member and Chapter Development was filled by Carrie Andrews, who started on February 26, 2024. She broke down the duties of the newly created job: "In this position Carrie will focus on providing services, support, and development for TC's members, chapters, and leaders. This will include hosting First Friday leader calls, working closely with the Coaching and Repertoire teams, and overseeing communications such as the newsletter and leader list." The job description also included involvement in outreach, exploring our gathering strategies, and creating a plan for TC's social media presence.

In June, a permanent Executive Director was selected by Board members, the Search Committee and interview panelists after interviewing many applicants. Sarah Simoncini began working in the position of ED on July 15, with Leeann remaining on staff through August 30 to support her in the position. Much gratitude was expressed for Leeann's capable guidance and willingness to take on the Interim ED position and for Priscilla Green's skill, efficiency and positive attitude handling TC business.

The cessation of the IRS Group Exemption was another big change for Threshold Choir. Our Board, our new ED and a legal team were obliged to determine what structural changes would be needed to remain in compliance with 501(c)(3) requirements, and they decided that the Fiscal Sponsorship model was the best fit for the affiliated chapters in our organization. The development of new Chapter Agreements to keep us in compliance was initiated. Maintaining our Charity status would also require modifying Virtual Accounts for chapters and guidelines for restricted and unrestricted donations.

The Website Committee hired a new web service because committee members were unhappy with the service we were receiving from the current vendor. Rachel Davis and Cathy Baird contributed vast amounts of time and expertise to this endeavor. Chapter Administrative Functions were improved and searching the repertoire by song title was made possible, with searching by key words to follow. The online process by which we renew memberships and update chapter members was improved. The committee also announced that a section dedicated to our 25th anniversary will be added to the website.

After soliciting, assembling and editing over 100 issues of the TC Newsletter, *Our Voice, Our Song*, in January, Joan Linton made a request for someone to assist or take over the process as she spends more

time traveling. Faith San Felice stepped up to share the duties until Joan retired, and Carrie Andrews took it over. Joan retired from the Newsletter at the end of 2024 with our deep appreciation.

One final change: After a Buddhist priest noted that the content of the song "Metta Sutta," doesn't actually reflect the traditional Metta Sutta, the title was changed to "May You Dwell in the Heart." Those of us who consistently drew a blank on the first line of this cherished song before the title change were relieved that we would be spared that particular befuddlement going forward.

### **Silver Jubilee Celebration Plans Emerge**

Not one to sit on her laurels, dedicated Leeann Enright rejoined the Board of Directors at the end of her Interim ED stint, and announced she would chair the 25th Anniversary committee. The plans announced for the year-long Silver Jubilee Celebration included the development of a special logo, Zoom parties, a monthly Silver Jubilee Journal documenting the history of the organization and our Founder, Kate Munger, introductions to the singers who participated in first TC meeting, chapter histories and much more. Director of Member and Chapter Development, Carrie Andrews, encouraged chapters to plan gatherings to celebrate the momentous anniversary and offered her assistance. It was also decided that a Wikipedia entry would be submitted to expand TC exposure.

In preparation for the Silver Jubilee, the Repertoire Committee surveyed all chapters for their top 25 favorite songs and recorded our favorite 25 songs for release in our 25th year. Songwriter permissions were obtained for use on Social Media, grant applications, and other public offerings with the intention of making the music available to the wider world.

*The information presented in this chapter was gathered from Board Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and stories published in "Our Voices, Our Song" newsletters on the website. Many thanks to all who contributed to those minutes, reports and publications.*

## **Threshold Choir History - Part 12** **2025 - Celebrating Twenty-Five Years of Sacred Service**

The Board of Directors offering guidance and support during our Silver Jubilee Celebration year includes Bridget Baker, Co-Chair; Glenda Guinn-Gilles, Co-Chair; Sudie Pollock, Secretary; Natasha Phillips, Treasurer; Caitie Deranek Stewart; and CJ Robinson.

Statistics collected as of December 10, 2025 show there were 2,803 active Threshold Choir members, 186 active chapters and 30 chapters in development. 27 of these active chapters and 9 of the forming are outside the U.S. Threshold Choir members have provided 19,900 reported sings so far this year (with about 70% of chapters reporting monthly numbers).

In June, Leeann Enright stepped back into the role of Interim Director when Sarah Simoncini resigned from the position. Leeann also served as the Chair of the Silver Jubilee Committee, envisioning, planning and coordinating the team implementing a wealth of offerings in honor of this remarkable milestone.

### **Silver Anniversary Happenings**

A monthly Silver Jubilee Journal featuring Threshold Choir origin stories, histories, spotlights on original choir members and announcements for the three Silver Jubilee Zoom Parties, in-person gatherings and more, kept us celebrating all year long.

Thanks to the efforts of the stellar Silver Jubilee subcommittee of the Repertoire Team, which was co-chaired by Loretta Burdeaux and Shasta Martinuk, a free download of the 25 most-loved songs in our repertoire was made available to all active members on TC's 25th birthday, March 21, 2025. The recording (available on Bandcamp) is the culmination of the committee's work surveying chapters for favorite songs, recording, obtaining permissions and, producing the recording with help from Annie Garretson and sound engineer Paul Schwotzer who donated his time. This legacy accomplishment is the first recording of TC songs that, with the permissions of songwriters, has been made available to the public.

The Anniversary Regional Gathering Challenge was met by Threshold Choir chapters around the world with more than 25 gatherings attended by over 1,200 members in 2025.

### **Honoring Our Mission and Music in Creative New Ways**



Our organization's wings spread wider this year when the Board made the decision to purchase a \$5,000 five-second underwriting spot with PBS to support the acquisition of the film, "The Last Ecstatic Days." The film about conscious dying is running on all three PBS platforms starting on August 5, 2025, and will continue for three years. The TC spot shows a photo of bedside singing with "You Are Not Alone" being sung in the background.

A new audience was introduced to 12 of our precious songs when Kate and TC singers from San Francisco, Sacramento, Palo Alto, San Leandro, Santa Cruz, Portland, Oakland, Inverness and Berkeley collaborated with the Ciarra D'Onofrio Dancers. The aerial dance "Heart String" was performed in San Francisco over the summer. Kate explained the performance was "dedicated to the memory of Ciarra D'Onofrio's parents. Their mom, Claire, hosted the Bolinas Threshold Choir in her home 23 years ago when Ciarra and her sister were small. They remembered our songs as the lullabies they heard as they fell asleep."

Our Founder and magnificent ambassador for TC, Kate Munger, also reported that a "loose tradition" of singing in the Baha'i Temple in Wilmette IL has begun. She was elated about the inclusion of Threshold Choir members and music when, "Members from 7 American Choirs joined on October 10 to offer a devotional concert that concluded with the audience joining us at the entrance singing 'Walking Each Other Home' as the sun set, sparkling and golden in the early evening. As THE primary building for the Baha'i Faith in North America, we are deeply honored to be invited to share our prayerful songs and reverent style of singing in this amazing structure where all prayer is sung. Threshold Choir first sang in this Temple following the 2016 All Choir Gathering in Chicago. Another Baha'i Temple Concert is planned for October 2027."

### **Fiscal Sponsorship Chapter Agreements Roll Out**

The Board and TC staff met the challenge of a change in nonprofit compliance regulations by developing Fiscal Sponsorship Chapter Agreements that all US affiliated chapters were required to sign this year. Changes were also required for the way in which donations and petty cash are handled, and a 25% annual administrative fee for chapter account balances of \$250 or more was introduced to support the Threshold Choir general operating expenses and fiscal sponsorship requirements.. The Board and staff managed to get the new agreements finalized and calculate and report on balances held on account for each affiliated choir by the first of October. Coincidentally, October 1, 2025, was the 10 year anniversary for our Office Manager, Priscilla Green. Thank you, Priscilla, for your steady presence and capable service to all in the organization.

### **Wrapping Up the Year**

As this year of celebrations comes to a close, Leann and our dedicated Board members continue the search for a permanent Executive Director with the search committee processing 180 applications for the position. Fundraising efforts continue, including the year-end appeal, and have exceeded budget expectations for the year. Work groups and committees continue their essential work supporting our mission and our members. The Board also agreed to work with Natasha Phillips Board Treasurer, whose Doctoral project in Healthcare Administration will include a study of industry best practices and operations recommendations for TC.

Reviewing what has been accomplished over the past 25 years, I feel immensely proud to be part of this organization. To every singer, chapter leader, Board member, staff person, task group and committee member who has kept Threshold Choir growing and mission-focused: thank you. Most especially, I want to mention the boundless gratitude we all feel for Founder, Kate Munger's insight and determination manifesting Threshold Choir, and for her generosity nurturing the growth of the organization and repertoire that mean so much to us.

Having honored 25 years of history, service and member bonding, and those who made it all possible, it is fitting we look to the future now. At the November 8th Silver Jubilee Watch Party, visionary Kate Munger shared some of her dreams for future endeavors of Threshold Choir: taking care of our aging members (honoring aging voices & capacities); a "Sing to Me" 1-800 number; and getting our songs out into the public including offering songs to Community Choirs and Girl Scouts. What are your hopes and dreams for the next 25 years of Threshold Choir service?

### **Threshold Choir 25 Year History**

It is my hope that this record of the history of Threshold Choir will serve as a reminder of what has been accomplished and to honor those who have contributed to the success and longevity of Threshold Choir.

This account of the development of and milestones of Threshold Choir was written and compiled as part of the Silver Jubilee Journal that was emailed to members each month of 2025.

Susie Joyce

A timeline summary of highlights from our rich and unique 25-year history follows.