

# How Can I Keep From Singing?

By Narielle Living

Murawski Photography

There is a joy in singing unlike any other. Daniel Parks knows this and has devoted his life to leading others in song in a variety of venues.

"I came to Williamsburg in 2021 as the Interim Director of Choirs at William & Mary, which is a position I'm still in," he says. In addition to this, he is the artistic director of the Williamsburg Choral Guild. "Last season, the Choral Guild held a search for a permanent artistic director. There was an interim director for a number of years, and I was appointed last spring and started working in June, planning the current season and testing the music and venues, hiring musicians and working with the board to make the season."

Prior to coming to Williamsburg, Daniel taught high school choir in a public school in Wisconsin. "That is where I'm from originally. I went to school in Wisconsin and got a de-

gree in music education, taught in K-12 public schools, and went back to graduate school in 2016." He came to Virginia from Boulder, Colorado. "I had finished a doctoral program in choral conducting."

The Williamsburg Choral Guild is a volunteer community choir, Daniel explains, but they sometimes work with professionals as well. "We collaborate with professional musicians in the area that play instruments and sing with us, sometimes solo. And then we also have core singers who are contracted to help our volunteer members, learn the music, and lead the way in rehearsals and performance. So, we have professional singers who are core members of each section as well."

Daniel's background includes a family that was immersed in the world of music. His career path to working with voice was guided by his aspiration to teach.

"I have been a jack of all trades, musically, for most of my life," he says. "I started piano and singing in choir when I was nine years old. Piano was my primary instrument, and I also played guitar and mandolin and banjo and bass and drums and other percussion instruments. I played in bands."

With a family full of musicians, Daniel realized his goals early in life. "The first thing I knew as a young adult was that I wanted to be a teacher. That certainty really felt like a calling," he says. While the world of teaching is wide open to numerous possibilities, there seemed to be only one path for him. His pursuit to be an educator pushed him in the direction of music education. "I love music. I was also an assistant theater teacher in college and thought about doing that for a while." But his first love, music, called him home. "I also teach music theory courses, and I love doing

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that. But really being in rehearsal with singers and working on singing together with them without instruments... that has always been the magical experience for me. There's always something that happens in a choir rehearsal that's surprising and exciting, and that renews my passion for it."

Today, his responsibilities are numerous. He conducts the William & Mary choir, auditions people for Concert Choir, and teaches academic music courses. "I'm teaching a course on African American spirituals right now."

People come from all over to be in the Williamsburg Choral Guild or to simply volunteer with the organization. "Members of the choral guild and of the board all have their own story," he says. "But everyone

has had some kind of experience of choral singing that was meaningful to them. For some, it was singing in school choirs or singing at church or taking private lessons or some mix of all the above. We have some members who played an instrument or played in a band or orchestra growing up, and then as an adult with adult responsibilities found that singing fit into their life in an even more manageable way than keeping up on an instrument. It really is a group of people who are passionate about community music and specifically choral music. And then there are people like friends and family who get recruited to help with volunteer opportunities. But unlike some organizations that I've been a part of, everyone involved in the choral guild is committed to the mission because everybody loves the art form in their own way."

One of Daniel's main responsibilities with the Williamsburg Choral Guild is reviewing and choosing pieces for the group to perform. This is a process he enjoys and learned about in graduate school. "A driving factor in my decision to study choral music at the graduate level was to learn more about the wide world of choral literature, and a lot of that included its history. Every conductor has their own way of finding music and their process for choosing. I was fortunate to benefit from the experiences of my mentors, who take that part of the job very seriously, and they don't just pull out any old thing."

Once he settles on a theme, he says, that's when the program comes together. "It's a matter of looking at the requirements of a piece and looking at the budget that we have and strategizing about what's going to work for the organization and for marketing and for budgets." But the important part, he notes, is that the music is challenging and exciting for the members of the choir first and then also the audience.

The Williamsburg Choral Guild performs at the Williamsburg Presbyterian Church, which is near Merchants Square on Richmond Road. He loves this space. "I have a great relationship with them," Daniel says. "We also rehearse there. That's kind of our home in Williamsburg."

Outside of his musical career, Daniel stays busy. "I love home cooking and baking especially. I also love games of all types, both analog and digital." He and his wife, Annika, live in Williamsburg, where there's always plenty to do. But what keeps him most busy is his toddler son, Oliver. "As far as hobbies, a lot of those are on the back burner as we chase around our two-year-old," he says with a laugh. "A lot of times, you can see us at Kidsburg in Williamsburg."

Daniel Parks says that his family is the most important part of his life. "They're my world. My professional life and also my passion is to go out and make music with people, and they're a big part of making that happen." His son is at an age, he says, where playing together is fun. "Rediscovering the simple pleasures of banging the keys on a piano and playing a drum and getting the guitar out of its case are all things that my son really delights in."

For anyone interested in joining the Williamsburg Choral Guild, Daniel says that early 2024 is the best time to come out and audition. "Folks can join us for our April concert, which will be Carmina Burana by Carl Orff. The title of the concert is O Fortuna, which is the most famous part of that. It's one of the most performed and well-known pieces of choral music, and it's a blast to sing that piece. It's exciting and dramatic, and the more the merrier. So, if anyone's thinking about joining the community choir, that's the perfect opportunity to hop on board." **NDN**

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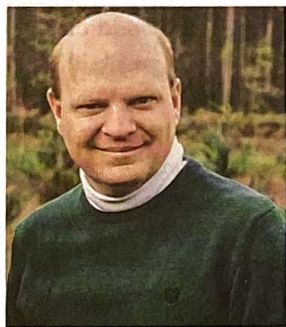


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