

## **Stephen Cottle**

When I was invited to audition for the Hartford Chorale by a former Vice President of Membership, I remember being delighted, but also terrified. While I have sung with various church groups over the years and in college, I had never auditioned for a group like the Chorale. I spent several weeks going over and learning the music that was provided for the audition. I didn't know quite what to expect, and I was very nervous. It made things a little better that my daughter was also going to audition. I made sure to have copies of the music and my audition information form all filled out.

When I arrived, I parked in the church parking lot, and quickly found the correct door. There was a little table set up inside, and a very friendly lady there to meet me. Chelsea had the earlier appointment, so I got to wait while she was called in.

The accompanist came down and chatted for a bit while Chelsea finished up her audition. When Chelsea came down, I went up and handed my folder (Kathy must have made up a folder for me while I waited, but I don't remember her doing that) to Rick Coffey. Rick and I chatted for a minute. He had some questions about my background with music performance, and he asked how I heard about the Chorale. Had I ever heard the Chorale perform? I had to admit that I hadn't.

Finally, it was time to sing. We went through the prepared pieces and I managed to get past the nerves and do well enough. Then, the accompanist headed back out, and Rick asked me to sing some intervals and do some exercises. He told me that I had done fine and that I would hear from the Chorale within the week.

Imagine my surprise when I found out that both Chelsea and I had been accepted into the Chorale. We were going to get the opportunity to sing on the Bushnell stage with the Chorale, the Hartford Symphony, and some fantastic soloists. I dug into the music for the first concert right away. I still had a little time to try to learn it before the rehearsals began.

When I arrived at that first rehearsal, there were a few things that I noticed right away. First, the sound of the Hartford Chorale is just glorious even from the first rehearsal. It is a truly intense experience standing in the middle of 150 people who can sing! Second, I felt so unprepared. It seemed like everyone around me already knew their music so well. I committed myself to singing at that level, rewarding Rick for allowing me into this elite group. It still takes me about an hour a day, every day during the season to be as prepared as I need to be. Finally, everyone is so friendly. The members of the Hartford Chorale share a love of music just like mine. We thoroughly enjoy singing together and being together.

Over time, I've come to know the names of all of those people I met on that first day, Kathy Tabachnick, Jim Barry, Rick Coffey. I have renewed my commitment to this group over and over. While the process can be scary and humbling, it is also entirely worthwhile. Getting to make music like the Chorale makes it entirely worth the work.

And now, when you come to your audition, I'll be there waiting for you at the little table in the church. I look forward to it!