



The Burton Street Singers

Description

Made-in-Westmount a cappella octet shares love of harmony while helping the needy

By **Edith Skewes-Cox** and **Phillipa Rispin**

In the fall of 2004, singers from the recently folded CBC Radio Concert Choir, many of them former members of the original Yellow Door Choir, decided to start their own four-part a cappella group of men's and women's voices.

Isabel Belina was the instigator. After years of singing with various choirs and ensembles, Isabel felt the time was right for a small self-directed group that could rehearse in someone's home. She called fellow choir veteran and organization maven Edith Skewes-Cox and soon the first meeting of the nascent group was convened in Isabel's living room, on Burton in Westmount. A lively discussion of possible monikers finally produced the name of the Burton Street Singers. It was only later the octet realized that Westmount's Burton "street" is actually an avenue!

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Though the group began with a holiday repertoire for churches and seniors' residences, they quickly widened their scope to include a mix of folk, doo-wop, pop, classical, gospel, world music and everything in between.

A cooperative effort, the Burton Street Singers have no conductor and everyone contributes song ideas, performance tips and feedback on the final product. Rehearsals are an energizing mixture of music, laughter and companionship.

Over the years, the Burton Street Singers have continued to perform for seniors, to provide entertainment at several City of Westmount events (e.g., Christmas tree lighting, Earth Hour celebration), and to participate in various fundraisers and events around town as well as MTLacappella 2014 and Porchfest NDG 2015.

In March 2010, the octet produced its first self-titled cabaret featuring the group and guest artists, raising funds



for victims of the Haiti earthquake. The next two years followed a similar format and included opportunities for younger performers to get stage experience.

In 2013 the group produced its fourth annual cabaret without guest artists, providing the smaller ensembles that add such variety to the show. That year also marked the decision to make the NDG Food Depot the permanent recipient of the group's cabaret profits; last year's edition raised over \$1100.

Leaving behind their day jobs of teacher, engineer, translator, librarian and writer-editor, the eight talented individuals of the Burton Street Singers come together to share their love of harmony and make beautiful music.

Still primarily an a cappella ensemble, they add the occasional instrument as needed. Though there have been a few personnel changes over the years, today's octet features six of the original eight who gathered in Isabel's living room that fall evening nearly 12 years ago.

The Burton Street Singers will host their seventh musical cabaret night on Saturday, April 30 to raise funds for the NDG Food Depot.

The talented singers will perform as an octet as well as in smaller ensembles, delivering a program of songs that span moods and eras from the mid-16th century to the present day. A smattering of doo-wop, bluegrass gospel, modern folk, a dreamy song or two, madrigals, and much more will make for a beguiling evening.

Burton Street Singers Fundraiser For NDG Food Depot

Saturday, April 30, 2016
8 pm, doors open 7:30 pm

Kensington Presbyterian Church Auditorium
6225 Godfrey, corner of Kensington, in NDG

Tickets are \$15; \$10 for students and seniors; \$5 for children 12 and under.
Snacks and drinks will be for sale.

For more information contact Phillipa Rispin at 514 481 9861 or phillipa.rispin@gmail.com

Image: courtesy of the Burton Street Singers

From left to right: front – Laura Mitchell, Faigy Grzeda, Phillipa Rispin; back – Jean Montpetit, Edith Skewes-Cox, Don Smith, Isabel Belina, Phil Jones.

Edith Skewes-Cox and Phillipa Rispin are Montrealers with complementary abilities: translator (Edith) and writer-editor (Phillipa), alto (Edith) and tenor (Phillipa). They met in the Yellow Door Choir, sang in the CBC Performing Arts choir, and have been members of the Burton Street Singers since the group's inception.

Category

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