

# What's a nice Jewish girl doing singing Xmas carols?

## Arts Scene

by Heather Solomon

Gloria Aronoff doesn't mind the question. "What's a Jewish girl like me doing singing Christmas carols? Well, every ethnic group is represented in the choir, every age group, every religion. It all comes together harmoniously and what can be better than that?" she says of the Dec. 1-3 concert of the Lyric Theatre Singers.

Four shows are slated, including a matinee in the Loyola Chapel, 7141 Sherbrooke St. W.

All 41 members have also learned *The Chanukah Song (We are Lights)* by lyricist Steve Young and composer Stephen Schwartz. Schwartz is the Academy Award- and Grammy Award-winning writer of Broadway musicals *Godspell*, *Pippin* and *Wicked*, as well as composer and lyricist for the animated story of Joseph in DreamWorks's *The Prince of Egypt*, from which the song *When You Believe* won an Oscar.

Aronoff quotes the *Chanukah Song* lyrics as a mirror of the need for continuity and faith in the contemporary world: "Everyone who lights the candles has a bit of ancient spark/We are miracles lighting up the dark/We are lights of memory."

The group's musical director, Bob Bachelor, says, "We have often sung a song for Chanukah in our holiday concerts. This is not the first time. When I choose one, it's



Gloria Aronoff sings alto with the Lyric Theatre Singers in their annual holiday concert Dec. 1-3. HEATHER SOLOMON PHOTO

because I have found a piece that is well written musically and has something to say."

It's also true that a good percentage of Christmas songs have been written by Jews. As part of this year's two-hour program, Lyric is performing a medley of Irving Berlin's Christmas songs.

There will also be Brazilian, Broadway, Celtic, French and gospel selections. Five live instrumentalists accompany the choir.

Aronoff has been incorporating music

into her life since she was a child. "Roslyn School was where I first had formal choir training with Miss Vera Jameson. She was a legend," says Aronoff.

The English Montreal School Board Chorale Youth Choir, directed by Patricia Abbott, making a guest appearance with Lyric for the Dec. 1 performance, will no doubt bring back memories for Aronoff and many others.

"At Westmount High, I played cello in the orchestra and I'd already taught myself guitar. I'm a folkie at heart. Folk songs are fun for harmonies, and I'd bring my guitar to Jewish summer camp, Camp Ramah," says Aronoff.

She also accompanied her patients' sing-alongs with her guitar in the open psychiatric unit of the Jewish General Hospital, where she was an occupational therapist for 30 years and from which she retired in January.

"For me, singing is close to prayer. It's meditative and therapeutic. The feeling of harmonizing in eight parts and all of them fitting together, gives you hope," she says.

These days Aronoff devotes herself to Lyric under the direction of Bachelor, whom she first met when she auditioned

and won the *Fiddler on the Roof* role of Grandma Tzeitel in a production staged by the now defunct Arcadians.

"The next year, Bob was working with the West Island Lyric Theatre, and I followed him," she says.

The Lyric Theatre Singers were born out of that group in 1990 as a means of keeping musical theatre alive in Montreal in the form of Broadway revues and concerts, without the expense of full sets.

Choir members wear black with an accent colour for the December "stand and sing" shows and are more elaborately garbed for their annual June performances that involve extra staging and up to 10 choreographies.

"As soon as we finish Christmas, we're already starting Broadway. We have to learn all of our music and moves. It's a real commitment," the singer says.

Rehearsals are seven hours a week and Aronoff, an alto, enjoys positioning herself between newbies to the choir so that she can "help them along." ■

For tickets to Candlelight Christmas 2016, call 514-743-3382 or visit [www.lyrictheatrecompany.com](http://www.lyrictheatrecompany.com).



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