

# Up Front

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## **Terrie Ashbaugh,**

artistic director for the Southern Arizona Women's Chorus, is prepping her group to perform at the D-Day Commemorative services this June in France.

Photo by Thomas Veneklasen.

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# Chorus Girl

**“PEOPLE ARE MOVED BY MUSIC,”** says Terrie Ashbaugh, artistic director for the Southern Arizona Women’s Chorus (SAWC). “I don’t have a favorite type of music — it’s too hard to pick just one. Music truly does change the world.”

As a professional musician for more than 40 years, Ashbaugh began playing the piano when she was six years old, while living in Châteauroux, France.

“My father was in the Air Force and we would move every two years because of his work,” Ashbaugh recalls. She decided to take piano lessons after making a deal with her parents, Dale and Catherine Edwards. “We agreed that if they wouldn’t nag me about practicing, I would want to do it on my own. I ended up loving to play so much that they had to nag me to *stop* practicing and to eat dinner!”

Ashbaugh studied at Seattle Pacific University, obtaining a BA in piano performance in 1978. “As a Christian, I wanted to take the gifts God gave me and put them to use.”

She first became interested in choir directing in 1988, after the church choir director left and she was asked to replace him. “I had no idea what I was doing at the time, but everyone seemed to enjoy the music.”

Soon she was using her musical talents as the training choir director and concert choir accompanist for the Columbia Boys Choir and Girls Choir in Seattle, Washington. There, she taught students to sing, read music, and harmonize at competitions all over the world, including Russia, Czech Republic, Canada, Germany, and France.

“We would place first, second, or third place. I felt a sense of accomplishment, but I wanted to learn more about directing choirs.”

In 1996, Ashbaugh and her husband Robert, a photographer and fellow singer, decided to move to Tucson. She took choral conducting classes at the University of Arizona, receiving her master’s of music in 1999.

“Dr. Maurice Skones was very big in the choral world and I was fortunate to learn from him. He taught me to see the choir as one instrument, not 50 individuals singing. They are one and their voices should sound as one.”

The pianist and choral director also sings and arranges music. With a mezzo voice that is “not too high and not too low,”



SAWC members Lauri Latack, Dianne Ewald, Diane Sala, Bonny Milne, Paula Olson, Sheila Musiek and Barb Lamm are led by Terrie Ashbaugh. Photo by Thomas Veneklasen.

Ashbaugh began directing the Faculty & Staff choir at UA for 10 years.

While finishing her master’s degree, Ashbaugh took on another role as the artistic director of the Southern Arizona Women’s Chorus (SAWC) in 1999, transforming a small club of singers into the community-based organization that it is today.

“I tend to be humble about things, but seeing the growth and impact the chorus has had on the Tucson community makes me feel very good.”

SAWC’s music is always varied. “One year we will do classical music, the next year jazz, oldies, or songs of the poets, and so on. It is always different.”

Along with ticketed spring and winter concerts, SAWC makes time to serve the senior community.

“We sing for about 10 retirement communities. It’s a priority for us to sit and talk with them after our performance.”

This June, SAWC will be the sole U.S. choral performers during the official D-Day Commemorative services in France. The group plans on performing songs including, “Set Me as a Seal,” a song honoring the WWII vets who did not make it home.

“This is not only a huge honor for the Southern Arizona Women’s Chorus, but

it is a huge fundraising venture for us as we’ve never had to raise so much.”

SAWC will offer two events to cover the \$150,000 travel expense. On April 2, the chorus will perform several songs at the Hilton Tucson El Conquistador Golf & Tennis Resort for the D-Day Commemoration Fundraiser. On April 17, the group will offer a public concert at Ascension Lutheran Church titled, “Springtime in Paris.”

Ashbaugh says SAWC holds auditions twice a year. “If anyone is a really good singer and can read music, she should contact us now because I need 10 more singers to go to France for the D-Day Commemorative services.”

Ashbaugh encourages Tucsonans to come to a concert.

“I hope the community comes to our concerts and feels the passion we have for entertaining.”

For more information on how to donate to SAWC visit:

Arizona Choral Arts Association: <http://www.azsings.org>

Southern Arizona Women’s Chorus: [www.southernarizonawomenschorus.org](http://www.southernarizonawomenschorus.org)

GoFundMe: <https://www.gofundme.com/sawccdday>

— Megan Guthrie