



The Chorus Impact Study  
**SINGING FOR A LIFETIME**



**GA** GRUNWALD ASSOCIATES LLC



## FOREWORD

As the advocacy, research, and leadership development organization for the choral field, Chorus America's mission is to empower singing ensembles to create vibrant communities and effect meaningful change. Our focus on research is key to this mission. Research shines a bright light on the amazing impact that group singing has on our communities and our world.

In the case of our new *Chorus Impact Study: Singing for a Lifetime*, the data is clear. The sheer number of Americans singing today—over 54 million, more than ever before—is truly striking. What's even more striking are the benefits that singing in a chorus offers to both individual singers and to communities. And the more engaged singers are in their art, the more benefits they report. Put simply: Singing is good, and more singing is better.

This new study builds on our previous Chorus Impact studies by tracking data on the number of people who sing and the ways in which group singing enriches their lives and our society. For the first time, the study also explores the value of singing for older adults, a growing area of the choral field.

Why is this research important now? Because the benefits of group singing directly

address challenges we are facing today. At a time when we feel increasingly stressed and disconnected, singing encourages mindfulness and meaningful social relationships. At a time when we are searching for ways to bring different communities together and find common ground across divisive issues, choruses are powerhouses of connection and tolerance. And at a time when we are living longer and looking to maintain a high quality of life into retirement and beyond, singing promotes healthy, vibrant aging.

On any given day, people are singing together in small towns and big cities, in orchestra halls and churches, and at formal performances and casual community singing events. Their songs draw on musical traditions from gospel music to symphonic choral works to barbershop harmonies. The diversity and commitment of singers and the joy found in singing have the very real potential to create positive change.

We hope this report serves as a call to action to leverage the power of choral singing to improve lives and strengthen communities everywhere.

Catherine Peterson, Chair

Catherine Dehoney, President and CEO

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### Katherine B. Andersen Fund of the Saint Paul Foundation

Cincinnati May Festival Chorus

Choral Arts Society of Washington  
Colorado Children's Chorale

Encore Creativity for Older Adults  
Indianapolis Children's Choir

San Francisco Girls Chorus

Kirkwood Baptist Church



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Studies commissioned by Chorus America over the last decade on the social and civic impact of choruses in America provide the go-to source for understanding the benefits of choral singing. This new Chorus Impact study, commissioned in 2018, builds on the 2003 and 2009 Chorus Impact studies to compare findings across more than a decade. This latest study, *Singing for a Lifetime*, also provides a current look at the array of social, health, and psychological benefits that older chorus members reap now and over a lifetime.

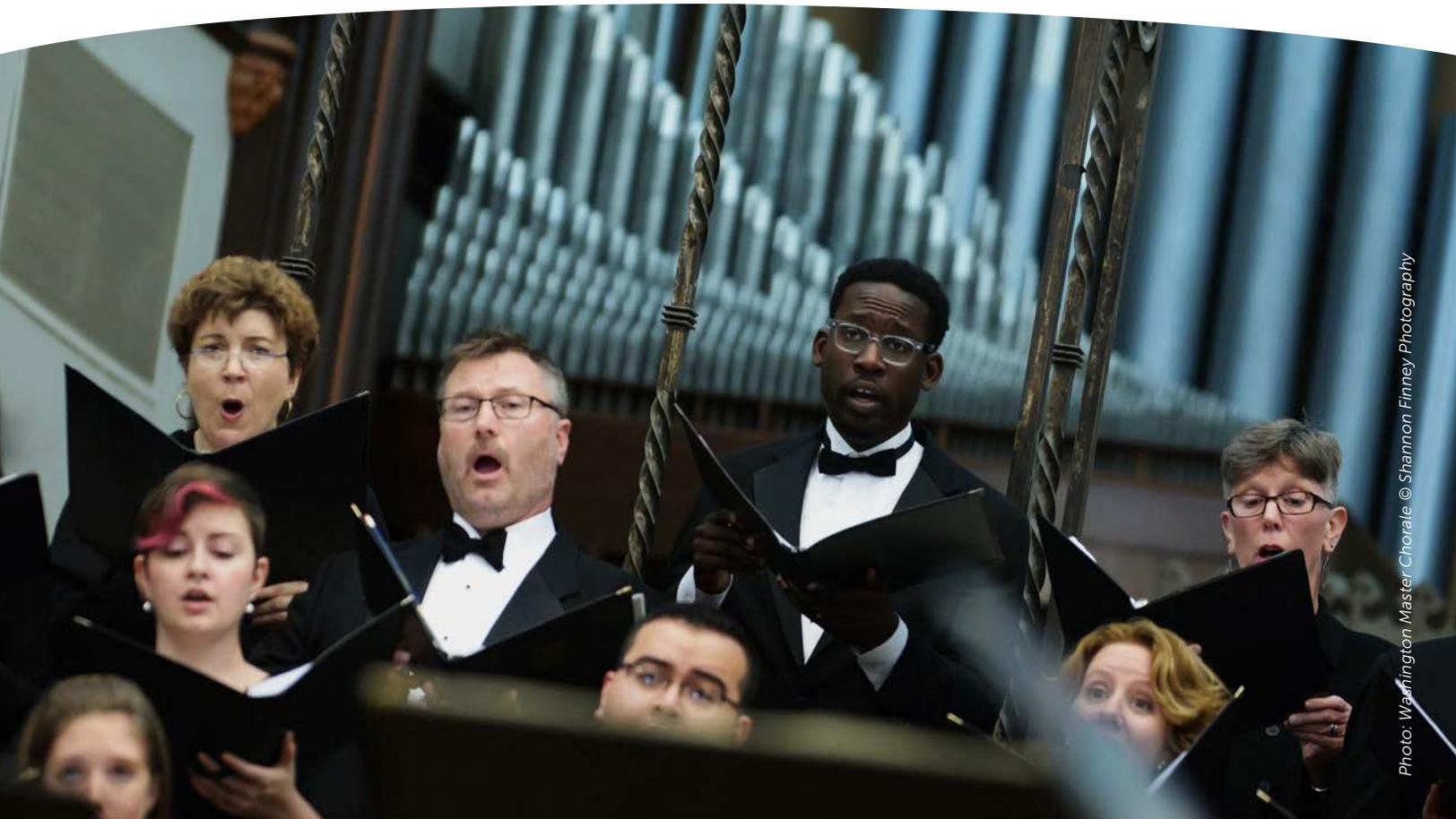
Choral singing remains strong in America. That's good news, because choruses play an important role in society today. While this research does not prove that choruses cause singers to lead healthier lives, connect with others, or contribute to their communities, the data shows some remarkable connections. People who sing are more connected to others and more likely to contribute positively to their

communities. And as our population ages, choruses may contribute to keeping older Americans healthier, happier, and more active.

As with the 2009 study, this research was conducted by Grunwald Associates. It is based on online surveys completed in November 2018 by 5,736 chorus participants and comparative surveys with a representative general population sample of 506 U.S. adults age 18 or older, and a separate representative general population sample of 600 U.S. adults age 62 or older.

### About the Findings

Unless otherwise noted, all differences in the findings are statistically significant. Information on the diversity of the sample, steps taken to rule out potential confounding variables in the results, and details on how the research was conducted are provided in the Methodology section on page 25.





## KEY FINDINGS

**Finding 1** **CHORAL SINGING IS A SIGNIFICANT PART OF AMERICAN LIFE, WITH MORE THAN 54 MILLION AMERICANS SINGING TODAY.**

- The number of Americans singing has increased over the past decade, with more than 54 million adults and children participating in choral groups today. More than one in six Americans over the age of 18 sings in a chorus.
- The percentage of Americans singing today has increased over the past decade, up to 17% today from 14% in 2008.
- Music education in schools is key to lifelong singing and the benefits it brings. The majority of adults singing today say that they began singing because of a school choral music education opportunity. Over half of all choral singers started in elementary school, and three-quarters started by the end of high school.

**Finding 2** **ADULTS WHO SING IN CHORUSES REPORT SIGNIFICANT PERSONAL BENEFITS, INCLUDING FEELING LESS LONELY AND MORE CONNECTED TO OTHERS.**

- Nearly three-quarters of singers (73%) say choral singing helps them feel less alone or lonely. Compared to the general public, they are far less likely to report indicators of isolation or depression.
- Choral singers report stronger relationships and better social skills than the public at large. Nearly seven in 10 singers say that singing has helped them socialize better in other parts of their lives.

- Choral singers credit singing in a chorus with making them more optimistic, mindful, and resilient. Eighty percent of singers expect more good things than bad things to happen to them, while only 55% of the general public has the same positive outlook. Singers are also more likely to feel a sense of purpose in their lives and to find their lives meaningful.
- The more exposure people have to choral singing, the more benefits they report. Choristers who belong to more ensembles, rehearse more frequently, and have been singing longer are more likely to perceive benefits.
- Younger, low- or middle-income chorus members, and those with lower levels of education, are also more likely to feel they benefit from participation.

**Finding 3** **CHORAL SINGERS ARE REMARKABLY STRONG CONTRIBUTORS TO THEIR COMMUNITIES.**

- Chorus members give back to their communities in a big way. They are more likely to contribute financially to the organizations that they support than the general public. They also volunteer more frequently than the general public in a wider range of areas of need, both inside and outside of the arts—and they are more likely to take on leadership roles within the groups where they volunteer.
- Chorus members are good citizens and exhibit greater civic leadership than the general public. Ninety percent of singers report that they vote regularly in national and local elections, while only 55% of the general public makes the same claim. Choral singers also run for public office more often than their fellow Americans.

- Chorus members credit singing with helping them be better collaborators, team players, and listeners. Compared to the general public, choral singers rank themselves more reliable and are less likely to prefer electronic communication to face-to-face interaction.
- Chorus members are more adaptable and tolerant of others than the general population. Almost two-thirds of singers (63%) believe participating in a chorus has made them more open to and accepting of people who are different from them or hold different views.

**Finding 4** **OLDER CHORAL SINGERS REPORT BOTH A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE AND BETTER OVERALL HEALTH THAN THE GENERAL PUBLIC.**

- Singing in a chorus seems to have a significant impact on mental health. Older choral singers (age 65+) are less likely

than the general public to say they have challenges with cognitive abilities, such as doing calculations in their heads, finding the right words to use, or organizing activities. Nearly eight in 10 older choristers credit their choral participation with helping to keep their mind sharper.

- Older singers (age 65+) engage in a broader range of activities than the general public in the same age cohort, such as reading, attending cultural events, and physical activities. They are also significantly more likely to continue working, including working by choice.
- Nearly 20% of older choristers say that choral singing has helped relieve or improve one or more chronic health conditions. Overall, singers who are age 65+ have fewer physical limitations than the general public of this same age.
- As with adult singers of all ages, older singers report that being part of a chorus helps them feel less lonely. Older choristers are significantly less likely than the general population to say they “often feel left out” or isolated from others.



Photo: Los Angeles Master Chorale's Big Sing, 2017 Chorus America Conference © Jamie Pham



## ABOUT CHORUS AMERICA

Chorus America empowers singing ensembles to create vibrant communities and effect meaningful change by offering services that promote artistic achievement, organizational strength, and advocacy.

Chorus America is the advocacy, research, and leadership development organization that advances the choral field. We support and serve choral conductors, administrators, board members, and singers with tools, training, peer networking, and access so that choruses are better able to contribute to their communities.

Chorus America serves more than 6,000 choruses, individuals, businesses, and organizations with a wide array of programs, publications, research, and personal services. These services strengthen their ability to build strong organizations that foster quality choral performances and community connections.  
[www.chorusamerica.org](http://www.chorusamerica.org)

## ABOUT GRUNWALD ASSOCIATES

Grunwald Associates is a full-service research and consulting firm whose work has informed the debate on a range of national policy issues. Grunwald offers an in-depth understanding of education and innovation, combined with mastery of state-of-the-art research methodologies.

The firm specializes in challenging public and proprietary assignments for nonprofit, corporate and government clients. Services include sophisticated quantitative and qualitative research, desk research, stakeholder communications and engagement, and strategic counsel.

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Photos sourced from Chorus America member choruses

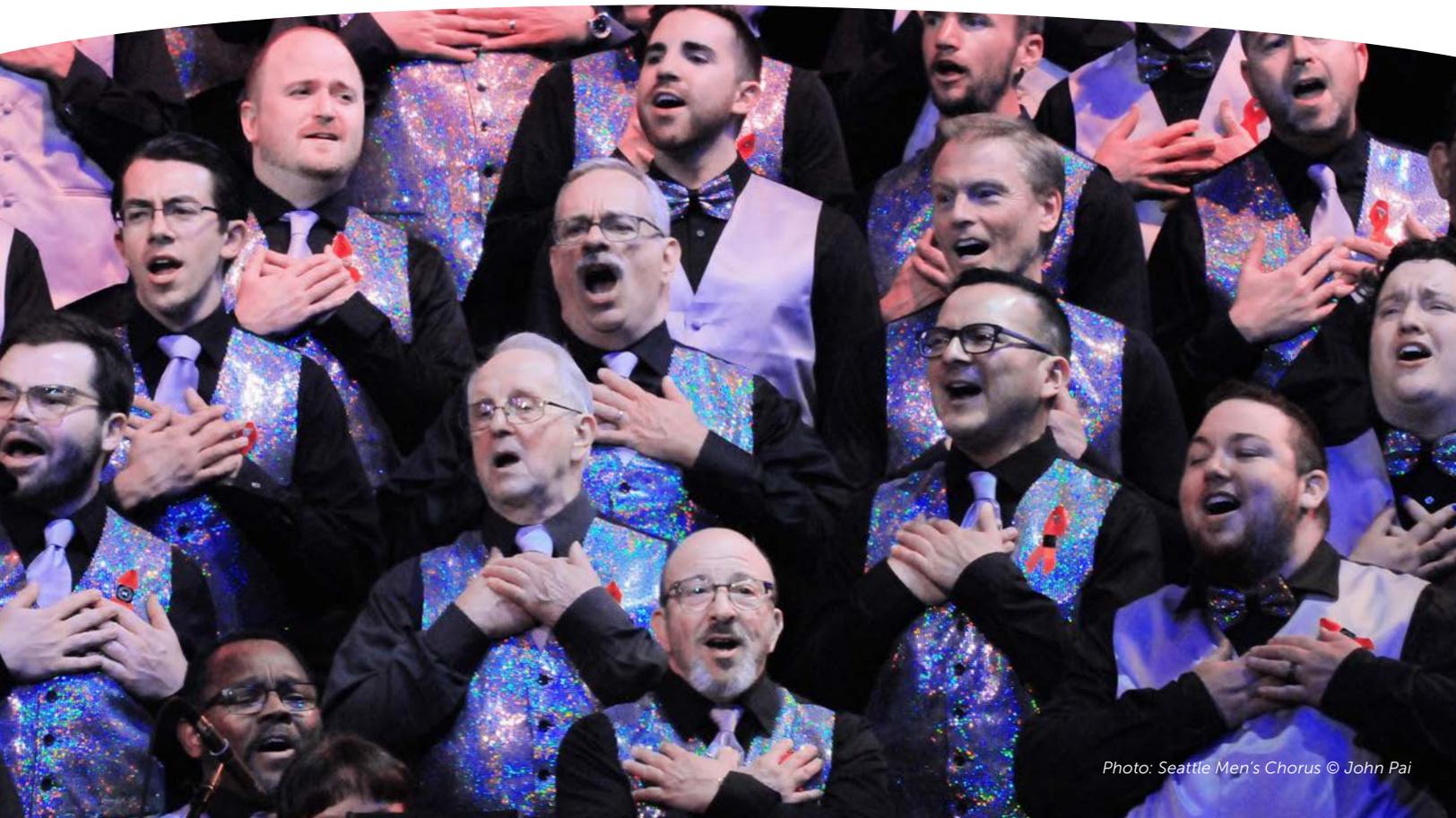


Photo: Seattle Men's Chorus © John Pai



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