



**30 Years of Story Telling Caps** – Jim Franklin

There are still some caps available. The price for the public is \$20. Members may purchase one hat at (near) cost at \$15. Wear it with pride! It should spark some conversation, giving you the opportunity to share your MVE pride and to start conversations to recruit new singers.

Technically, our 30<sup>th</sup> year continues until we hit our 31<sup>st</sup> birthday on April 29, 2020. *Um*, is that correct, Bryan?



**Calendar for January and Early February 2020**

Monday, January 6	Rehearsal	St. Luke’s at 7pm
Monday, January 13	Rehearsal	St. Luke’s at 7pm
Monday, January 20	Rehearsal	St. Luke’s at 7pm
Monday, January 27	Rehearsal	St. Luke’s at 7pm
<i>Tuesday, January 28</i>	<i>Board Meeting</i>	<i>St. Luke’s at 7pm</i>
Monday, February 3	Rehearsal	St. Luke’s at 7pm
<b>Saturday, February 8</b>	<b>Most of the day Chapter Event &amp; Installation</b>	
<b>Friday, February 14</b>	<b>Singing Valentine’s</b>	

**WANTED: Guys to form Singing Valentine Quartets**



Friday, February 14 is a perfect day to get three friends together and go out to work places and restuarants to sing a couple lovely songs and take pictures.

If you’ve not done it before, you will find it is a blast. Think about it. Quartets WANTED even if for just part of the day.



## **From the President's Desk**

2020 vision

MVE brothers, I'm excited about our future. Along with your Board and Pteam, we have begun creating and pursuing opportunities to:

- **Perform more** - possibilities include the 2020 Wisconsin Music Educators Association Conference (WMEA), Lake Park Musical Mondays and Democratic National Convention events
- **Get bigger** - we are doubling down on Membership growth, attacking on all fronts
- **Strengthen our fraternal bonds** - a fancy way to say have more fun together, with a couple new social events in the works
- Quartet and Tag- build your independent performing skills through quartetting
- **Climb from Good to Great** - we do many things well. This year, we will get honest about the gap between our current "good" level and where GREATness lies, and how to get there.

As your President, I promise to take responsibility for the administration of this chapter. Hold me accountable. I'm emboldened by a great Board of Directors and Performance Team.

I ask you to promise to take the initiative to seek personal excellence always, and help make this a great chapter and a great year.

**Jim Franklin**

The buck stops here with me.  
Greatness starts with you!



## Interview with MVE Member Mark Ranum

**MVEer asks:** Mark, you've been a bass in the MVE since 2008 and have been involved in our shows as a ventriloquist, announcer, and as *Carnac the Magnificent*. What is your favorite moment in the MVE?

**Mark replies:** There have been a lot of them, to be sure. And it is hard to pick a single one. I would say it was the very first time I served as M.C. It was Christmas, 2009. That was our "Big Band" Christmas show. I had only been singing with the MVE for just over one year at that point. But the curtain opened, and the audience was screaming (and I DO mean screaming) their approval of the chorus.

At the risk of sounding sappy, you could feel the love passing back and forth between our fans and the chorus. I know it was obviously not the first time that occurred. And it will not be the last time. But it was the first time I was so aware of it. I think I rode the high for weeks afterward.

**MVEer asks:** Everyone enjoyed your Christmas show performance with **Andy MacLaren**. Tell us about your Scottish heritage and of your creation of Andy, please.

**Mark replies:** Like a lot of Americans at this point in history, my heritage is a mix of a lot of things. I'm 1/16 Scottish. But I've been intrigued by Scotland since my Freshman year in high school when I was cast in a production of *Brigadoon*.

I had wanted to do theater for several years by that point. And I think I would've been happy to sweep the stage. But, I was cast in a supporting role, the father (*Andrew MacLaren*) of the leading soprano (*Fiona MacLaren*). When the reviews came out, I was named "the most Scottish sounding actor on stage".



When I commissioned Andy (the puppet I used in our 2019 Christmas show) you can probably guess the origin of his name and heritage

**MVEer asks:** How long have you been a ventriloquist?

**Mark Replies:** LOL. When I was about 8 years old I asked for a Jimmy Nelson/Danny O'Day puppet & a L.P. (anyone remember L.P.s?) course in Ventriloquism for Christmas. I practiced ventriloquism for so many hours that I drove my parents crazy. For the next five years I performed at every opportunity; for birthday parties, talent shows, radio shows and even my great aunt & uncle's 25th wedding anniversary. The summer before my freshman year in high school I got a special work permit and worked full time in my dad's company (he was an arborist) all summer long so I could afford to commission my first professional ventriloquist figure.

But, there were so many extracurricular activities I wanted to take part in in high school that my last "big event" as a ventriloquist (performing for 450 or 500 audience members) was on my high school's band, chorus and orchestra Christmas concert my freshman year. That following spring came Brigadoon and ventriloquism, for me, almost completely fell by the wayside. That is, until I begged **Mike Lietke** for a few minutes on the MVE 2019 Christmas show. Being the kind and trusting person he is, he agreed. I quickly learned that after all those years, performing as a Ventriloquist was NOT like riding a bicycle. Nor was recapturing my Scottish accent. Oh well...

**MVEer asks:** Sometimes you use both your first and middle name (Mark Trevor) and more recently just as Mark. Which do you prefer and why?

**Mark replies:** Aaaaahh, good question! My birth certificate contains all three. And I like the sound of my first and middle name together. But in America, we tend to want to shorten casual greeting names --not lengthen them.

After I passed my MVE audition, I asked that all three appear on our printed programs. To the best of my knowledge, they always have.



**MVEer asks:** Over the past eleven years or so in the chorus, you've seen some changes in our chorus. What do you see as a goal for us as a chorus as we enter 2020 and beyond?

**Mark replies:** We seem to have adopted a mantra in the chorus ("Twenty more dudes on the risers".) I know we repeat it

regularly. And that's great, because personally, I believe that's one of our most important goals at the present time.

**MVEer says:** Thanks, Mark. And say thank you to Andy for us as well. Happy New Year to you both.

### **Welcome Christmas Shows** – Dick Marcus

“I loved it,” was the most common response for the audience who attended both of our shows on December 14 at the University School of Milwaukee. They loved the school and the look. Many had praise for the music of **Martini**, others for the fun new songs like *Text Me Merry Christmas*. The expert organist at my church and UWM retired piano professor loved the arrangement of the powerful *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. There was so much to love.



Backstage in the orchestra practice room that is **Steve Johnson's** room, guys relaxed at intermission and while **Martini**, **Jim Franklin's** singalong, or **Mark Ranum's** interactions with Andy were going on. It was a great place to drink more water, reminisce together, or open the side door to stand in the blast of cooler air.

Here is a collage of photos of back-rubs and conversations together.



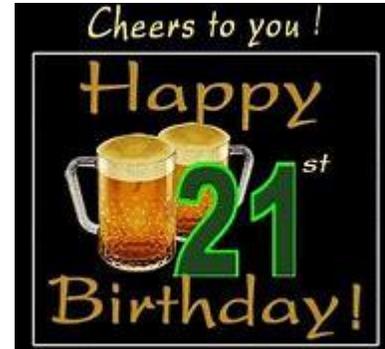
**Martini and MVE Party at the Mequon Pizza Company**

**Scott Ganswindt** arranged for the *Mequon Pizza Company* to stay open later than it usually did for our gang of thirsty singers and hungry guests. We absolutely filled the joint with merriment, singing, and friendship.



## Whose Birthday was on our Show Day?

**Bruce Vitale** and **Mike Lietke** both have great voices, both use extra large vocabularies, and both have a knack to puns and humor. But what do they also share in common? December 14<sup>th</sup> is their birthdays.



## VA Performance on Monday, December 17, 2019

It is now a tradition that the MVE goes to give back some cheer to our vets at the VA Hospital in Milwaukee on the Monday after our show. We all know our songs and are ready to entertain, greet vets, and share songs in a singalong. The VA provided a great cake and punch this year to make the evening even more festive. **Mike Lietke** and **Dylan Keegan** reprised their solos on *Text Me Merry Christmas*. **Nick Beaudin** sang his solo in *The Holly and the Ivy*. And **Jim Franklin** got the audience enthusiastically to join in singing *Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. **Bob Krantz** videotaped us singing *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, try clicking:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0ByzHCdiUXDTeckJPMXInaG4ydEhaRXhfUjZZU1RzbzIQYIBR/view?usp=sharing> Below is a collage that includes our warm-up room singing and singing in the 9<sup>th</sup> floor cafeteria.



## **The Ice House after the VA Performance**

For the second year in a row, the MVE picked **The Ice House** as a post-performance gathering place. Like *The Mequon Pizza Company* after our Welcome Christmas shows, the MVE filled up the small bar close to the VA Hospital with song and merriment.

Here is a collection of a few pictures from that night including **Bob Krantz** and **Dale Heinen**.





*EDITOR'S NOTE: If you are seeing the same photos reappear over again, it is just that your editor is learning how to use a collage generating technique in this issue using PowerPoint and putting it into Word. Please forgive the experimentation.*

**Toll of the Bells:** The forgotten history of nationalism, oppression, and murder behind a Christmas classic by LYDIA TOMKIW

SOURCE: <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/12/carol-bells-shchedryk-ukraine-leontovych.html>

EDITOR'S NOTE: It was suggested to me that I include a recent commentary on one of the songs we sang, The Carol of the Bells. It is interesting. Because of its length, it is shortened, but the link gives the full article.



The Ukrainian National Chorus in Buenos Aires in 1923.

A group of men and women in traditional embroidered dress took the stage at Carnegie Hall on Oct. 5, 1922, for a performance that the New York Tribune dubbed "a marvel of technical skill." The New York Times called the music they made "simply spontaneous in origin and artistically harmonized." The New York Herald described the costume-clad singers as expressing "a profound unanimity of feeling that aroused genuine emotion among the listeners." The audience that cheered for encores and threw flowers on the stage didn't know it at the time, but they had just heard what would eventually become one of the world's most beloved and recognized Christmas songs: "Carol of the Bells."

Onstage was the Ukrainian National Chorus conducted by Alexander Koshetz. At the end of Part 1 of the program at Carnegie Hall, they performed composer **Mykola Leontovych's** arrangement of a traditional Ukrainian song the playbill called "**Shtshedryk**." The audience likely also did not know that just over a year before the New York premiere, Leontovych had been assassinated by the *Cheka*—the Bolshevik secret police.

The song's journey onto the world's stage and its transformation into an American Christmas classic is a tale of musical inspiration, nationalism, and political violence. At its center is a beautiful, haunting melody that has captivated audiences for over a hundred years and spawned countless versions.

"There are many people who don't know it's Ukrainian," says Larisa Ivchenko, head of the music department at the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine in Kyiv. When I visited in 2017, Ivchenko had spread out photographs, sheet music, and program tour brochures that are part of the archive's collection. A photo dated 1919 from Prague shows the chorus, then known as the Ukrainian Republican Kapelle.

The chorus had just set off on a world tour that would take them across 10 countries in Europe over three years and then to North America where they'd sing widely across the U.S., including small towns far from the glitz of Carnegie Hall. In the U.S. alone, they visited 36 states and 115 cities, according to a count by Tina Peresunko, a researcher at the Ukrainian Institute of Archeography and Source Studies. "Shchedryk," as it is more accurately spelled, was the standout "hit" from the chorus' repertoire according to concert reviews and the conductor Koshetz's own reaction recorded in his memoirs, she adds.

"When they came over to America it would have been sort of this curiosity of interesting, exotic songs," says Marika Kuzma, a professor emerita in the Department of Music at the University of California–Berkeley.

An article in the New York Times heralded the group's arrival by boat in late September, "50 RUSSIAN SINGERS LAND IN GAY DRESS." While the article praised the singers, it also reflected the attitudes of the time. The Times performance review described the singers in "motley costumes" with "gaudy" headdresses singing "primitive peasant airs" of the "six provinces of 'Little' or Southern Russia." Conflation and confusion between Russia and Ukraine irritated the Ukrainian chorus who would correct reporters, according to archival material collected by Peresunko.

Dating back to pagan times, Ukrainians sung *shchedrivky*, songs welcoming the start of the new year with hundreds of versions, including ones devoted to bears and bees, says Valentyna Kuzyk, a senior researcher at the Rylskyi Institute of Art, Folklore Studies and Ethnology in Ukraine.

Leontovych drew inspiration from Ukrainian folk songs and melodies as a composer, choral conductor, and teacher. He was born in 1877 to a religious family in the Podilia region of southwestern Ukraine and completed studies at a theological seminary. His musical career would take him across the region he called home as well as to Kyiv, St. Petersburg, and Moscow. Besides "**Shchedryk**," he produced over 150 other classic works for choirs during a career that was cut short.

**Leontovych** worked for several years on his arrangement and orchestration of "Shchedryk." It's likely the song's famous four-note tune started from a version he would have heard during his childhood in Podilia, Kuzyk says. Leontovych sent his

arrangement to choir conductor Koshetz in August 1916 and several months later, a choir in Kyiv premiered the song.

The Ukrainian version has nothing to do with bells or Christmas. The lyrics tell the tale of a swallow summoning the master of the house to look at his livestock and the bounty the coming spring season will bring as well as to look at his beautiful dark-eyebrowed wife. In pre-Christian times, the coming of the new year and spring were celebrated in March.

“**Shchedryk**” came to prominence in its current version during a tumultuous and bloody period. The Romanov dynasty, which then ruled a vast part of Ukraine, fell in March 1917 and for a moment, an independent Ukrainian state—the Ukrainian People’s Republic—was declared in 1918. Symon Petliura, the president, saw the value in promoting Ukrainian culture around the world to gain support for his fledgling state. And it was in this window that the chorus, under Koshetz’s leadership, embarked on its tour.

While touring in Europe with the support of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, the choir would pass out brochures with the symbols of their new country and sing what is today Ukraine’s national anthem, according to Persesunko’s research.

Other musicians have put their own touches on the tune from the **Mormon Tabernacle Choir**, to the **Trans-Siberian Orchestra**, and even a sultry sounding version by **Destiny’s Child with Beyoncé**. One of the most popular on YouTube, with over 149 million views, is a recent update by the *a capella* group **Pentatonix**. The artists singing these versions likely have little idea of the song’s tragic history.

There is still deep reverence for the original “**Shchedryk**” in Ukraine, Ivchenko said. While the song is being used in some commercials now, they are not Christmas ones, but for New Year’s. New versions are also being made in Ukraine, including a popular cartoon video by Ukrainian musician Oleg Skrypka and singer Tina Karol recording a popular video.

In recent years in Ukraine, there has been an effort to tell the story of the famous song. A museum dedicated to Leontovych’s life was updated in the town of Tulchyn where he spent his later years, and a festival celebrating the song took place there earlier this year.

While the Ukrainian chorus saw members come and go, those who finished the tour never returned to Ukraine and instead settled in the North America, Kuzyk says.

“You could be 5 years old or 95 years old. Everyone knows *The Carol of the Bells*,” Berger says. “It has legs that last forever and forever and ever.”