May 6, 2018 - Tone Cluster - Quite a Queer Choir



When the choir I had sung tenor with for 10 years underwent a change in direction, I began casting about for a new choir to join. A couple of years earlier, my sister had joined Tone Cluster, and when I attended their concerts I found this group's obvious enjoyment of singing together infectious! My niece joined the following year, and then it was my turn.

"Tone Cluster is a 35-voice auditioned choir for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people, and their allies in the Ottawa area. We pride ourselves on creating a queer-positive environment where singers can be themselves while striving for choral excellence.

"Tone Cluster is a proud “out” choir! We make sure that our audiences are aware of our point of view when we sing… and we trust that you, as a queer singer or straight ally, are proud to support a queer choir."

I love singing with this group of very diverse and chorally talented people, in part because it is so inclusive in its mandate. It is lovely to be welcomed as a straight ally. Many LGBTQ choirs are exclusive in their welcome of members, an understandable but limiting position.

During my time with Tone Cluster, we have welcomed and been intentional in our accommodation of several members with mobility challenges, supported a member who has transitioned from female to male, and provided financial support for those who wish to participate but are unable to pay their full fees.

This May, the choir will be travelling to Calgary to participate in Unison Festival 2018, where I will be singing alto. In the final concert of our season, "Queer as Folk (Music II)", I'll be in the tenor section again. This has led my fellow tenors to refer to me as 'bi-sectional'! It can be a challenge to remember which part I'm singing at any given time, but the unfailing support and appreciation of my section-mates and the camaraderie one experiences in this group have made my time with them memorable.

Nancy Illman