

What Is a Choral Scholar?

I have been pleased to hear, in the past couple of years, that some of you have chosen to attend UUCGL because of the quality of the music we do. That makes your team of music professionals very happy! We all work hard to provide nourishing and inspiring music for Sunday worship services that is also challenging and satisfying for the choir. Worship is our primary focus, although we are involved in many other activities such as the recent fund-raising concert, music projects for youth, and Adult RE programs.

We are Nami Hamada and Laura Hargrove, organists; Dan Meyers and Bobbie Hill, choral scholars; and me, Frances Fitch, director of music and player of organ, harpsichord, and piano. Let me explain a little bit about us and about our roles as they have evolved, particularly the choral scholars.

The term choral scholar is one that comes from the English Cathedral tradition and could be translated as music intern. In some churches, this position is sometimes called section leader or soloist, but my concept of what choral scholars do goes beyond the role of leading the singers in each section (soprano, alto, tenor or bass) and singing occasional solos.

In a choir of volunteers, a trained musician with a strong voice, good sight-reading skills, a good heart, and diplomatic ways can anchor the group. They make it possible to learn and sing repertoire at a very different level than if that person were not there. They provide access for the choir and congregation to a huge body of choral music from all traditions and parts of the world. Without them, there would be more pressure on each volunteer choir member, and the musical possibilities would narrow considerably.

In our choir, Dan and Bobbie may appear to be just two more enthusiastic choir members, but they are much more than that. They are teachers, cheerleaders, and role models for the volunteers who give so much to the church through their participation in choir. The support they offer is essential.

Dan first came to UUCGL while pursuing a Master's degree in Early Music at the Longy School of Music. He is an extremely versatile musician, playing recorder at the virtuoso level, as well as playing Uilleann pipes, percussion, trombone/sackbut, and singing. He is a good and experienced teacher, and has been honing his conducting skills while with us. Dan is also a gourmet chef. He is a native of Washington State and lives in Somerville, where he works with Cambridge Local First.

Bobbie received her BA in Vocal Performance from the University of New Hampshire and now performs with several high-level choral groups in Boston and studies singing at Longy. She is a software quality assurance engineer (and wearer of many other hats) at the Broad Institute in Cambridge, in the Cancer Informatics group. She met Dan while they were both performing in the Christmas Revels. Their apartment in Somerville is filled with esoteric kitchen gadgets, and their freezer with lobster stock.

Nami came to the United States from Japan with the goal of becoming a pipe organ builder. The president of C.B. Fisk Organbuilders counseled that she first become a proficient organist, which she did by earning a degree in Organ Performance from New England

Conservatory. Nami is now a voicer at C.B. Fisk, working her artistry and expertise with the hundreds of pipes in each organ to make them all sound their best in the space where the new organ is to live. In order to accommodate her travel schedule (she voices on site all over the world), Nami plays for us once a month. A Tokyo native, Nami now lives in Ipswich with her partner, two cats, and a rabbit.

Laura studied organ in Gloucester with Barbara Bruns and Gretchen Longwell-Cooley and went on to study music history and performance at the Hartt School of Music in Connecticut. She teaches English Literature and Public Speaking at North Reading High School, and has previously taught music, drama, and debate in Manchester-by-the-Sea. She lives in Salem with her dog.

I came to UUCGL in 2002, thus starting the fourth long-term church position of my career and the first in a UU church. I have many years of experience as a performer and teacher, touring and recording artist, and even academic dean. My other part-time job is at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge. I grew up in Nahant and now live in Gloucester with my husband and 24-year-old son.

We are all deeply committed to the music ministry of UUCGL and are grateful for the warmth and welcome of this community. Thank you all so much!