

ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

Orange County Women's Chorus names first paid executive director

By Anne Artley

Sept. 13, 2018 4 PM PT

Eight years ago, Allison Hieger joined the Orange County Women's Chorus to sing at a high level and meet more people.

Now, the board has named her as its first paid executive director, a position she is starting this month.

"The choir has changed and grown so much since I've been in the group," Hieger said. "We're a community chorus, nobody is paid to sing with us, but we don't sound like one. Often women's choruses are treated as an afterthought. We want to continue to elevate what a women's chorus is and break that stigma."

Hieger has served on the board since 2012. She planned the Laguna Hills-based group's first international tour in 2015, which took them to the United Kingdom and ended in a performance at the Eisteddfod, a music competition in Wales. The chorus took third place in the folk category.

In her new role, Hieger is responsible for running the administrative side of the organization. She brings more than 10 years of experience managing arts education programs for Orange County's Pacific Symphony, the music education organization Midori & Friends, the Metropolitan Opera Guild and the Tennessee Performing Arts Center.

“As a singer, [Hieger] is an invaluable member of the ensemble and a frequent soloist,” Orange County Women’s Chorus Artistic Director Eliza Rubenstein said in an e-mail. “As a board member, she’s proven herself to be a wizard in a number of different areas. For example, she was in charge of developing our current website and has been our audition coordinator for several years in a row.”

A mezzo soprano, Hieger said she enjoys the chorus because members have the chance to perform different types of music. Her favorite concert was “Rocking The Boat,” which took place in spring 2017. The group sang an original piece commissioned by composer Joan Szymko to the text of Alla Bozarth’s poem, “Water Women.” Hieger described the work as empowering and uplifting.

“We commission composers to write new works every few years based on a text or a poem,” Hieger explained.

In addition to her new role with the chorus, Hieger plans to continue writing curriculum for Pacific Symphony’s Class Act program. This is a partnership between the symphony and certain Orange County elementary schools to incorporate music into different subjects.

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“I wrote a math lesson this year on how rhythm is actually fractions, and how a measure adds up to a whole,” Hieger explained. “It’s tactile; students can clap or march to their

fractions or create a song. Some of our schools don't have music teachers so it's the symphony's way of giving back."

Hieger herself has "sang since she has talked," according to her family. She grew up hearing stories about how she entertained Christmas party guests by signing "Edelweiss" from the 1965 musical "The Sound of Music."

Although nobody else in her immediate family took to music, Hieger's great-grandmother sang professionally on the radio in the 1940s.

Now, Hieger and her husband, who also enjoys singing, are passing down their love of notes to their two young daughters, who are 4 and 21 months.

Anne Artley is a contributor to Times Community News.

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