



## Why I Sing

By Steve Dogde, HMC Bass

**A**s I begin my 14th year with Heartland Men's Chorus, I have been asked to reflect upon why I sing. The easy answer would be a love of music. But then most of the people in the audience are also lovers of music. And that is where my association with HMC began—in the audience. In the early 90s, I had season tickets, primarily to support a few friends who were singing with HMC.

Shortly after that, my world was dramatically changed. Within a period of 13 months, my partner of 16 years and our two best friends all died from AIDS. Like many gay men of my time, I was left to grieve and to struggle to create a new life. Battling depression and feeling very lost, my friends in the chorus said, "Come sing with us." I mustered up my courage and auditioned.

I had never sung in a chorus before. Looking back, I recall that my only objective for that first holiday concert was to memorize all the music. Little did I realize the thrill I would experience during the performance. It was over before I knew it, and I was hooked. And shortly before that first concert, I met Paul and we will celebrate our 13th anniversary next month. He is that handsome fellow with the great smile and loving heart in the baritone section.

As I became more involved with HMC, I found myself serving on the Board of Directors for 6 years and serving as President of the Board for two. One of my responsibilities was to talk with new members during their orientation session. It became my favorite thing to do.

Each new member was asked to tell a little about themselves and why they had decided to join HMC. As I listened to their stories, I realized that while they, too, had a love of music, they also joined for other reasons. Some, like me, were recreating their lives after the loss of a partner, some had just moved to Kansas City and were seeking to build friendships, some had been abandoned by their families and were seeking a new sense of family, some joined as part of their coming out journey, and some were straight men who were not intimidated by singing with a group of gay men. And remarkably, the chorus was able to meet all of these needs and still make wonderful music.

Over the past 13 years, HMC has become a significant component of my life. Not just because of the hours spent in rehearsals and performances, but because of what it has given me. Many of my closest friends stand on the risers and sing with me. I have wonderful memories of performances, not just in Kansas City, but in Chicago, Washington, D.C., Dallas, Montreal, San Jose, Tampa, Miami, London, Paris and Hamburg. The times that we spend together rehearsing, traveling, and performing develop a true sense of the HMC family.

So you see, I do sing because I love music and performing, but I have kept singing because each time I do my life is enriched and I am a better person for my time with HMC.



*Steve Dodge with partner Paul Elo at the HMC Garden Party.*