

## **Martha's Vineyard Minnesingers**

Martha's Vineyard is an island located seven miles off the coast of Massachusetts in Northeastern USA. It is six miles wide and twenty miles long. The year-round population is 15,000 but in the summer months of July and August, the population swells to 115,000.

The island's high school, Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, has a student population of approximately 700. From this island high school community, students ranging in age from fourteen to eighteen audition and are selected to become a member of a choral and dance troupe known as the Minnesingers. Membership is achieved after a rigorous process where candidates are tested on tone, diction, strength, musicality, and rhythmic and melodic accuracy. A strong commitment is required to meet the demanding schedule of rehearsals, concerts, performances, and appearances at local functions.

The Martha's Vineyard Minnesingers Choir was created in 1967 by director Tom Mills. He hand-picked a select group of students to sing madrigals and other secular music. The name, Minnesingers, is derived from the German word for love (minne), and was chosen in tribute to German troubadours who traveled the countryside in the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. They sang songs of love and courtship in a lyrical style called Minnesang. The Minnesingers have been an island tradition for the past 46 years.

The Minnesingers stayed close to home during their first year. In 1968, they began to travel regionally and soon were touring college campuses throughout New England. In 1975, under the direction of Bob Nute, the Minnesingers added a choreographed dance show, performing their dual choral and dance concerts for local residents and tourists alike. In 1984, the Minnesingers began taking their productions to Europe and have traditionally traveled abroad every other year. They have performed at a variety of venues, including cathedrals, churches, schools, and performance halls, serving as musical ambassadors in Germany, Denmark, Lithuania, England, Ireland, Austria, France and the Czech Republic. In April of 2013, the Minnesingers will continue the tradition of international travel with a performing tour to Croatia.