

# BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION



## *The Silver Lake Chorus*

Choruses date as far back as Antiquity, so it's rare that a self-defined "chorus" could also be described as novel and unique, let alone cool. Meet The Silver Lake Chorus, a collection of twenty young, dynamic, seriously talented Angelenos, whose debut album features original songs written exclusively for them by all your favorite indie artists, including **Sia**, **Ben Gibbard** (Death Cab for Cutie, Postal Service), and **Justin Vernon** (Bon Iver).

Stodgy concert choir this is not - though the musicianship excels and the chamber-filling harmonies are clearly the product of accomplished, studied arrangers. Nor is TSLC a high school glee club or college a cappella group - their enthusiasm and obvious camaraderie are just as infectious, but they've left the saccharine sweet dance numbers and costumes at home. And while the audition process is way too selective for this to be a community choir, The Silver Lake Chorus is unquestionably a reflection of the place it calls home - an East Side LA neighborhood that celebrates human connection and community as much as it does free thinking and the creative arts.

When The Silver Lake Chorus began in January 2010, it wasn't aiming for fame, record sales, or even a single sold-out show. The plan was: get a bunch of singers together and make music, pure and simple. A flyer for the very first open audition read, "We sing everything from Radiohead to Rihanna." That anything-goes vibe lasted about one rehearsal. Starting a chorus in Los Angeles meant access to a slew of highly qualified vocalists, and as the bar for entry skyrocketed, the nature of the group quickly shifted from community chorus to professional-sounding ensemble. At the same time, establishing the chorus in Silver Lake made the underlying aesthetic of the group organically skew in an indie direction. But it wasn't until Australian singer-songwriter **Ben Lee** hopped on board that the chorus's already narrowing focus truly hit its mark.

Friends with a founding member, Lee heard the chorus sing their arrangement of Beck's "Lonesome Tears" at an early rehearsal and was blown away by how the song had been "reinvented into this massive Russian Gregorian chant." Immediately, he got an idea: instead of singing covers, Lee suggested the chorus take a completely original indie rock approach to the ancient choral art form. He signed on to produce their debut album and reached out to other artists and friends, asking them to write new music for the chorus. "Most people would think they can't approach Beck or Tegan and Sara, but as a songwriter, it's such an honor to have your song sung by someone else, especially twenty people with great voices. So I just started putting it out there," Lee remembers. Lee knew he could provide TSLC with "access to a level of songwriters who could set this apart from other choral experiences," and he was right. Songs soon poured in from artists like **Sia**, **Justin Vernon** (Bon Iver), **Aimee Mann**, **Tegan and Sara**, **The Bird and the Bee**, **Ben Gibbard**, **John Roderick** (The Long Winters), **A.C. Newman** (The New Pornographers), **The Flaming Lips**, and of course, Lee himself.

The Silver Lake Chorus has since created a distinctly unique sonic experience by giving original indie rock songs a lush and highly-tailored choral treatment, complete with ad-hoc instrumentation. Some songs are performed entirely a cappella ("From the Snow Tipped Hills," "Home Come

Home”), while others include drums and synths beneath the vocals and are thoroughly danceable, like The Bird and the Bee’s contribution, “Break It Down.” Then there’s the stirringly ethereal “Heavy Star Movin,’” which features a string quartet alongside hauntingly layered vocals.

Mikey Wells, TSLC’s musical director, and soprano Heather Ogilvy arrange each track together and note that, while vocals are always the focal point, a traditional choral treatment doesn’t serve every track equally. Ogilvy explains, “Some songs called for a more traditional choral sound, and some for a more contemporary arrangement. The process of letting the songs be our guide and working with the array of vocalists and instrumentalists within the group was completely freeing. We weren’t trying to make each song sound the same, we were trying to fully serve each as best we could.”

Wells adds, “We wanted voices to be voices, not to be substitutes for a guitar part that once was. And we wanted it all to live in a sound world that was both timeless and relevant today.” The pair’s own addition to the album, the sprawling and emotional “Home Come Home,” eschews all instrumentation and highlights the musical chops of the group as a whole. Wells explains, “We wanted to offer a pure experience that allowed the listener to witness the full rainbow vocal chorus without any bells or whistles.”

TSLC’s long-anticipated album drops June 16th, at which point the group looks forward to amping up its LA-based performance schedule. The chorus regularly performs in loud, cavernous rock venues, packed like sardines on stages meant for six band members, tops. Their favorite part of performing live? When the rowdy, unsuspecting bar crowd goes completely silent during the opening solo of Justin Vernon’s riveting “From the Snow Tipped Hills.” “You can hear a pin drop,” says Wells. “It’s transformative, not just for us, but for everyone listening, especially if they’ve never heard us perform before.” The chorus often ends shows with Lee’s triumphant “Overboard,” an anthemic call to leap headfirst into the unknown. Lee wrote the song for the chorus when he realized their album still needed a grand finale. “Going overboard is a last resort on a ship,” he says. “I liked the idea of taking it as far as we could.” Cue the drums and twenty voices all singing in unison: “Here comes the change, I’m not afraid, not at all.

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