



Wisconsin Singers Alumni Spotlight on Jana Petersen

By Caden Pulley



At five years old, Jana Petersen's love of music was ignited when she got to sing a solo in church. After a successful career in entertainment news, radio, and television, she would return to church to direct music for a congregation of over 8,500 at Hales Corners Lutheran Church. There,

she is able to channel years of experience as a Wisconsin Singer, producer, and TV professional into her work.

After graduating from high school in Oconomowoc, Jana wanted music to remain an integral part of her life, so she majored in it. And when her high school director recommended that she audition for Singers, she was glad to give it a shot. She was admitted to the troupe as a freshman, and stayed in for three years — as long as she could! After a year at UW-Madison, she switched her major to communication arts for radio, TV, and film production, rather than music. She became Company Manager in her third year, which helped to further develop her professional communication skills and attention to detail.

After UW, Jana moved to Nashville for eight years. While there, she combined her music and communication experience in two jobs, hosting entertainment TV on CBS during the day and playing piano bar gigs at night. She also spent two summers at Opryland USA, playing four or five shows a day in the Tennessee heat. It was a fun but exhausting life, and she eventually decided to move back to Milwaukee to raise her son closer to family.

In Milwaukee, Jana became a radio host and news anchor. In the morning, she hosted FM106, a country music radio station, and in the afternoon, she was a news anchor on CBS 58—more specifically, she was the first entertainment reporter in the city! Through this position, she had the opportunity to interview country music greats like Chuck Norris, Jane Seymour, and Woody Harrelson. After this, she went on to host New Home Showcase in Chicago, a TV show featuring everything from small condos to grandiose custom homes. This was a fun job with a schedule that allowed her to have time at home with her son, so Jana was dismayed when the show went off the air after the housing market crashed.

But when one door closes, another one opens. The end of New Home Showcase allowed Jana to dedicate her career to Hales Corners Lutheran Church, near Milwaukee. This brought her back to her hometown and allowed her to rekindle her love of music as the Director of Music Ministry. She rehearses with volunteer musicians during the weekdays, and they perform four services each weekend. Her communication skills and music ability are equally important as she coordinates more than a hundred musicians for their Christmas and Easter concerts. And when the pandemic shut down in-person services, she was well prepared to help ease the transition to virtual worship. Her experience in TV gave her unique talents in the church, so she has been working tirelessly to improve the quality of the livestreams.

As Jana put it, change can be disheartening, but there are always new opportunities. "Keep the faith," because there is something out there for you! Your interests really can become your career, so long as you work to achieve it.