

Complaints Choir turns whining into high art

SINGIN' THE BLUES



The Chicago Complaints Choir sings about tourists who must have deep-dish pizza and people who text and eat in the bike lane. Now New Yorkers get to vent.

BY JUSTIN ROCKET SILVERMAN

THE CABBIES DRIVE like suicidal maniacs and the bike messengers seem to have a genuine death wish. Subway announcements are impossible to hear; city buses never arrive, and when they do, they come three at a time. Your neighbor took off for a month's vacation in Europe and the alarm clock in her apartment has been blaring continuously since she left.

People in New York City have no shortage of complaints but few constructive ways to vent them (screaming from your fire escape doesn't count). That lack stands to be remedied tonight with the first meeting of the New York Complaints Choir.

Open to anyone looking to bitch about the city with like-minded whiners, the group will compile complaints, form them into verse and set them to music, ready to be performed in public. Organizers such as Marc Nasdor, a local poet and DJ, have been canvassing neighborhoods to recruit angry altos and sore sopranos.

"It's not that these things haven't been expressed before," Nasdor says, "but when someone is handed a card that says 'Got a gripe? Join the Complaints Choir,' they just light up and realize this is their chance."

Nasdor has already gathered an impressive list of grievances for the chorus.

"I wanted Harlem to get better, not unrecognizable."

"Commuter trains leaving New York stop running at 1:30, but no nightclubs have anything going on until midnight."

"My boyfriend always gets a little pee on the floor."

The first Complaints Choir was created in 2005 by artist Tellervo Kalleinen and her husband, Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen, of Helsinki, Finland. The concept originated with the Finnish word *valituskuoro*, which refers to a bunch of people complaining at the same time. The couple has since helped organize choirs in England, Israel, Australia, Russia and elsewhere. Last year, a choir of 52 singers formed in Chicago to decry the Windy City's many, many shortcomings.

"The Complaints Choirs are all about the general public," Nasdor says. "This is not a group of artists. This is a group of New Yorkers of all ages, shape, size and ethnicity."

The New York Complaints Choir is being formed in conjunction with P.S.1's new exhibit "Arctic Hysteria: New Art from Finland," which in-

cludes six videos of past complaints choirs, all playing simultaneously and singing at each other in different languages. Since the Finnish artists were coming to set up that exhibit, they decided to launch a choir in the Big Apple, too.

"The fact that it mixes both a chance to vent and a musical production is what fascinates people," said David Weinstein, the director of public programs at WPS1, the museum's in-house radio station. "You had local groups already expressing an interest in doing a choir, then this exhibit came to P.S.1 and the Finnish consulate stepped in with financing. It seems like the complaints choir's time has come for New York."

The first meeting of the New York Complaints Choir is scheduled for today at 4 p.m. at Mehanata Bulgarian Bkr, 133 Ludlow St. See complaintschoir.org for more info.

A sampling of lyrics from Complaints Choirs:

■ JERUSALEM

"McDonald's doesn't give you enough ketchup. Football players only date models."

■ BIRMINGHAM, ENGLAND

"It's too far away from the sea. Why don't they pay me more? Life was good before. Why is the beer so expensive in town?"

■ JUNEAU, ALASKA

"Our newspapers are way too thin. To get a state job, you've got to have a state job. The winter's too dark. And it rains, and it rains, and it rains."

■ ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA

"The waitresses are so rude. The No. 9 bus leaves every five minutes, but it never

comes back. I can't travel without a visa, and life is a permanent artistic crisis."

■ BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

"All the roads are dug up and the bridges closed, public transit is too expensive, and we travel cursing the whole way. The bike lanes are made of cobblestones."



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