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By Judith Monachina

## Singing as the way to health, of body and soul

"You see people in their cars singing their heads off but when they wind down their windows, they stop. When the windows open I don't stop," says Martin Meader, co-leader of a community singing workshop to be held at Berkshire Country Day School in Lenox this weekend.

A "first principal," like eating, Meader says singing is something that makes all people feel great, that it's an integral part of life in some cultures, and if we all would sing the world would probably be a better place.

Meader decided on his role of community singing workshop leader after two separate occasions when he was approached by people who said they heard he was starting such groups. He decided after the second time that it might be his destiny.

A movie producer, Meader says this work fits in between his jobs. He co-wrote and produced *Paradise Road*, which starred Glenn Close and told the story of primarily Australian, British, and a few American and Swiss women who spent three-and-a-half years interned in a camp in Sumatra during the second world war.

Exhausted and undernourished, two of the women began to organize the 600 women into a choral group. In secret meetings of not more than three people, since larger gatherings weren't allowed, the two women organized a 30 strong, four--part female vocal orchestra. When they joined together to sing as one, a guard was ordered to stop them and approached with his gun ready. But when they began to sing, he instead stopped and listened.

Meader is the musical director of *The Real Sing*, a 28 voice a cappella singing ensemble and two choirs that feature 250 singers in Australia. He was inspired to continue with his musical life by the film but it was not his beginning in music. Having sung in quartets and rock bands, he says one thing has led to another, including writing and producing the film.

Most people of the world sing. "Africans sing all the time . for us in the Western civilization, we tend to move away from it," Meader says. Like eating, it's essential: eating for the body, song for the soul, he says. "If I don't sing every day, I feel a bit stodgy," Meaders says, but when he starts singing again he feels his spirits left and his humor return.

He says this "innate thing" gets taken away from us by people telling us we can't sing, and by technology and distractions of modern life: Walkmans, televisions, computers.

Meader says the workshops attract a variety of people from office workers to teachers to people who work in factories. He has run workshops in Canada, Los Angeles and Anaheim, California, London, Philadelphia, Sydney and Perth, Australia, with plan to go to Toronto, New York, Connecticut, Minneapolis and after Saturday's workshop, back to Ottawa.