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Classical music in Antarctica — the April Fools' joke that wasn't...

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In 2011, harpist [Alice Giles](#) became the first Australian professional musician to perform in Antarctica ([and documented it in a blog](#)). Now, the Alexandria-based company Classical Movements wants to bring choral music to the continent – an idea that began as an April Fools' joke. (Courtesy photo)

Two years ago, the company Classical Movements was looking for an April Fools' joke for its website. Since the Alexandria-based firm has worked in 140 countries on six continents

as concert planners, presenters, and travel agents for orchestras and choruses, the company hit on the idea of announcing an event on the seventh continent: a choral tour to Antarctica.

You know it's a good April Fools' joke when people fall for it. Classical Movements began getting calls and emails asking how to go about booking.

Then they realized it might be even funnier — given the evident interest — if they actually did it.

This month, [Classical Movements](#) is starting to accept reservations for a choral tour of Antarctica from December 29, 2017 to January 14, 2018. Fifty (50) participants — who will be asked to demonstrate their singing ability — will fly to Argentina; rehearse for a few days under the tour's conductor, *Oscar Escalada*, give a concert in Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world; and then embark on a boat trip through Drake's Passage to give what may be the first public choral concerts in Antarctica.

“The reason it's complex,” says Neeta Helms, founder and president of Classical Movements, “is that it's so weather-driven. We may have to finesse this at the last minute. It's not going to be black tie and chairs. But we're going to do a concert, and it's going to be at least 30 minutes.”

[The company: Alexandria firm moves the music around the world.]

The audience may be a blend of scientists and other, non-singing passengers on the cruise (the ship, the G Expedition, holds 134). “There are about 5,000 scientists in Antarctica in the summer months,” Helms said, hopeful that some of them would be able to attend. There will also be at least one performance on board the ship, and a concluding concert during the final days — back in Buenos Aires. Despite the high cost (starting at \$14,500 per person), high-profile musicians, including the conductor Marin Alsop, have already expressed interest — the biggest challenge being less the money than the difficulty of clearing 17 or 18 days in a busy performing schedule.

It isn't that music is new to Antarctica— far from it. The [Icestock Festival](#) on New Year's Day at McMurdo Station, the U. S. Antarctic base and the largest settlement in Antarctica, features a range of music in nearly every genre, and has been held annually since 1990. As for art music, in 2011 the Australian National University's music school hosted an

Antarctica Music Festival and Conference that spotlight some of the more serious explorations of the seventh continent in musical terms, from the Pulitzer Prize-winner [John Luther Adams](#) to [Cheryl Leonard](#), a composer who works with field recordings and natural objects, and one of only a few musicians who have had residencies in Antarctica under the auspices of the National Science Foundation's [Antarctic Artists and Writers program](#).

Nonetheless, the idea of formal classical music coming to the South Pole seems to tickle people's funny bones. In 1998, the German author Elke Heidenreich and illustrator Quint Buchholz wrote a very funny children's book, "[Am Südpol, denkt man, ist es heiß](#)" (People think the South Pole is hot), about the Three Tenors coming to sing "La traviata" for the penguins, since they had exhausted their welcome in the rest of the world. (Pavarotti, of course, is Violetta.) The "opera ship from Vienna" depicted in the book bears a striking similarity to the G Expedition. Of course, opera at the South Pole has yet to happen — but if this choral tour comes off, just wait until 2018.

Might other [past April Fools' pranks](#) actually become reality? We can only hope.



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