Society would laugh at it. At us. But that doesn't stop us because we count ourselves among those who know only people and not society. Society, maybe even seen society; but since we can't talk to him (or her) we concern ourselves with people only.

Our choir is not just any choir. Its most unique feature is the fact that none of us can sing. Oh, we can screech and warble and hoot, but for most people such noises do not songs make. A second feature peculiar to our choir is that we have no rehearsals, only performances. In this way the energy that might be wasted on hours of tiresome practice is released all at once to the audience.

The group has a remarkable founder, and his leadership is essential to our future efforts. The one time our vocals faltered, he was the one to shake us out of our daze and rally us to greater noise, defiance and intensity. His name is Peter; at least that's the name printed on his cards. Though no one has yet verified this, we suspect he is a local painter of some repute. If anyone is the key member of the choir it is Peter, our leader and organizer.

Perhaps I should take time to tell about the advent of our group. The event took place in the heart of downtown, on the first Monday of September. A day when the afternoon sun was warm but not searing. Many people, perhaps after work or after shopping or for mere tourism, had woven their way to a park built mere tourism, had woven their way to a park built over in order to thunder down again. The concrete has been cast over concrete from sight, and the water hides the noise of the traffic. It's a city project, this Freeway Park, whose success is real, because people actually come to relax and enjoy themselves in the little oasis.

It is possible to climb onto a concrete block at the top of all the waterfalls and look down at park, people and water. I first took note of Peter as he stood atop this block. Peering down, he must have seen a small but densely foliated patch of land, dotted with people; men lying and sitting on the grass, women reading on the ends of benches, and an old man sputtering in conversation with a rose.

You would expect a future leader to summon the attention of his future followers by shouting from the highest point. Peter did not do this. I had begun climbing the steps beside the gorges of water, and Peter had begun down these same stairs, and we met at a landing. His bearing showed that he was going to make an approach, so I stiffened my walk and prepared to give a mild rebuff. He came up to me, smiled, said nothing, and handed me a small card. "Bible-thumper" was the thought that crossed my mind, and I expected the card to tell me that Jesus loved me. But it wasn't a religious leaflet; it was a little invitation, and said in tidy black print:

If you wish to see something real AND interesting, stand on the Madison St. overpass in 3 minutes. All invited. Thank You, Peter.

There are times when the "why-why-not?" battle rages just terribly in my head. This was not one of them. I was out for some sun before heading home, and the sun was just as warm on the Madison overpass as at the park, and the chance existed that something of interest might occur.

By the time I arrived at the overpass, 30 to 50 other people had already gathered. They all stood, somewhat embarrassed, waiting for something to happen. It was obvious they didn't know exactly what to expect, and many hands fidgeted with printed cards like mine.

And then Peter — our future choir leader — came up to us. He squeezed in between our loose crowd and began, in a whisper, to sing.

The Rush Hour Choir

He was the one to stretch the full length of the overpass and filled the width of the sidewalk. Peter led off, then stepped back. But sometime during the third song a thunderous clanking and a howling of brakes interrupted us; a truck had jackknifed, and just below us cars wound up on each other in the tangles of a chain collision. Our stomachs hollowed. We could have remained songless, staring stupified at the mess of metal and flesh below, or we could all walk off, horrified and mumbling to ourselves. Or we could start singing again. And strangely, we did.

Peter sang, giving us what little of the melody we could pick up. We started softly, but grew louder and louder when we realized that no one could really hear us no matter how well or badly we sang. Soon the halted traffic couldn't drown our voices. And soon we were singing for the troubled souls on the eight lanes below, and we sang for the skyscrapers, both those completed and uncompleted, and we sang for the foundered rain and the moaning gray clouds. And we sang until the wheels started rolling again. But before we left, when Peter collected the lyric sheets, he handed us each a new card.

The Rush Hour Choir sings Christmas carols. December 24th, 8:00 p.m. All invited. Thank you, Peter.

It was hard to tell what would happen. We could have remained songless, staring stupified at the mess of metal and flesh below, or we could all walk off, horrified and mumbling to ourselves. Or we could start singing again. And strangely, we did just that. Loudly, strongly, badly we sang, even though the halted traffic couldn't drown our voices. And soon we were singing for the troubled souls on the eight lanes below, and we sang for the skyscrapers, both those completed and uncompleted, and we sang for the foundered rain and the moaning gray clouds. And we sang until the wheels started rolling again. But before we left, when Peter collected the lyric sheets, he handed us each a new card.

Copyright 1980 Brett Bodemer: Mr. Bodemer, a native of Seattle, has attended The Evergreen State College and the University of Washington. This is his first published fiction.