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Tower Chorale's 'Spirit' honors historic milestone

By: Myrna Petlicki For Sun-Times Media



Patrick Godon will direct the Tower Chorale's holiday concert, "Spirit of the Season."

'Spirit of the Season' The Tower Chorale, St. Cletus Church, 600 W. 55th St., La Grange 8 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 14 and 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 15 \$20 adults, \$17 seniors and students, free for children 10 and under (708) 505-9570; www.towerchorale.org

There's a very good reason why Music Director Patrick Godon has programmed a number of spirituals into the Tower Chorale's holiday concert, "Spirit of the Season." "We were tipped off to the fact that it was the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation," Godon said. He decided that including spirituals would be a way to incorporate that important milestone into the group's 28th season.

Performances are Saturday, Dec. 14 and Sunday, Dec. 15 at St. Cletus Church in LaGrange.

Spirituals on the program, like "Go Tell it on the Mountain" and "Rise Up Shepherd and Follow," were selected because Godon liked their "Christmas feel."

"I love all the spirituals that we're doing," the music director added, "but I also love a particular setting of 'Still, Still, Still,' arranged by Barlow Bradford. It is absolutely gorgeous."

“We’re also doing a fun, jazzy arrangement of ‘Carol of the Bells,’” Godon noted. “It’s kind of a jazzy homage to the Emancipation Proclamation.”

Nearly 90 members of the chorus will perform. We spoke to three of them and they were as enthusiastic about the program as their leader.

Soprano Erin Cleary of Western Springs is doing a solo in “Christmas Day,” arranged by Gustav Holst. “The piece is a medley of Christmas carols,” Cleary explained. It includes, “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” and “Good Christian Men Rejoice,” among other selections.

Cleary’s solo is in “The First Noel.” “I sing that over other parts that are singing different tunes,” she reported.

This is Cleary’s third season with the choir. She earned a bachelor’s degree in vocal performance from Northwestern University, “But I went about 14 years without singing before joining the choir because life went in different directions,” she said.

Alto Nancy Krames of Clarendon Hills joined the group in 2010. “I’ve always sung in some respect,” she said. Krames discovered the Tower Chorale when she moved to the western suburbs.

The singer is looking forward to the upcoming show because, “For the Christmas concerts we do a lot of familiar songs but they have a different spin on them. Once again, there’s some really beautiful harmonies in some of the pieces we’re doing. Patrick puts together a great combination of music that the audience enjoys.”

Bass John Rosenberg of Hinsdale joined the group early last year. He has sung with his church choir for over 30 years.

Rosenberg enjoys “the challenge” of the Tower Chorale. “The director moves very fast,” he said, revealing, “I had to increase the prescription on my eyeglasses so I could see the music better during rehearsal in order to keep up with him.”

Rosenberg is enjoying preparing for the upcoming program because of “the diversity of the music the director chose.”

The 30-member St. Cletus Youth Choir will perform three selections and join the Tower Chorale for one number. Dennis Zimmer will accompany the group on organ and piano. A brass quartet will join in for a half-dozen numbers.

And Godon revealed, “There will be a couple of audience sing-along moments as well.”

Singer Rosenberg added, “There will be something for everybody in this concert.”