



## ‘Sing-Along Messiah’ at Raue a group effort

By JAMI KUNZER [jkunzer@shawmedia.com](mailto:jkunzer@shawmedia.com)

As much as the music featured in an upcoming “Sing-Along Messiah” has woven its way into society through the years, so has the annual event.

For many, Voices in Harmony’s “Messiah” is tradition.

The event takes place 4 p.m. Dec. 15 at the Raue Center for the Arts, 26 N. Williams St., Crystal Lake.

Along with the 57-member Voices in Harmony community choir, the concert features the McHenry County College chorus, a 25-piece orchestra, renowned soloists and calligraphy by Timothy Botts projected for the audience.

“It’s a combined event of many facets of our community,” director Steven Szalaj said.

“It’s just, ‘Come and enjoy the music in the way you feel most comfortable,’” he said. “If you want to sing along, we provide that opportunity. If they want to come to the concert and just listen, that’s fine too.”

The choir will perform Handel’s well-known “Messiah” as part of “Season of Passion: Love Came Down.”

Composed in 1741, the “Messiah” is a long-standing tradition and often performed by choirs.

“It’s the whole Christmas story,” he said. “It’s all about what Christmas leads to and its importance, the idea of love came down, dwelt among us and showed us how to love.”

The text tells the story of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and was written directly from the Bible, Szalaj said.

“It’s beloved by many, many people ... and there are parts of it that, particularly at this time of year, you hear it floating around in your society,” he said. “You have snippets of it on commercials and as background in stores and restaurants when we eat. People might not necessarily identify it, but it’s out there. It’s part of our culture.”

The concert will feature soloists Kirsten Leslie, a soprano; A.J. Wester, a mezzo soprano; Peder Reiff, a tenor; and Rick Ziebarth, a bass baritone. All originally from the Chicago area, they’ve performed on stages throughout the country.

Leslie grew up in Bull Valley, while Wester is from Johnsburg.

The addition of Botts’ calligraphy projected onto a screen for the audience adds a multi-media dimension to the concert, Szalaj said. The calligraphy will include the text of the “Messiah” being sung.

“It’s a very beautiful artistic presentation,” he said. “Not only do you have the sounds of the performances, but you also have this visual aspect that goes along with it.”