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# Raue Center hosts 'Sing Along Messiah'

By Annie Alleman By Sun-Times Media December 6, 2012 2:50PM



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Voices in Harmony and the McHenry County College Choir will present the Sing-Along Messiah on Dec. 9 at the Raue Center For The Arts in Crystal Lake. | File photo

'Sing-Along Messiah'

◆ Dec. 9

◆ Raue Center, 26 N. Williams St., Crystal Lake

◆ Tickets, \$15-\$18

◆ (815) 356-9212

[Rauecenter.org](http://Rauecenter.org)

If you've always wanted to sing Handel's "Messiah" but never had a choir breaking down your door asking you to join them, now is your chance.

The Voices in Harmony community choir and the McHenry County College Choir, under the direction of Steven Szalaj, will present the "Sing-Along Messiah" at 4 p.m. Dec. 9 at the Raue Center For The Arts in downtown Crystal Lake. Paige Lush will lead the audience.

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“The Messiah” will be presented with a 25-piece orchestra and projections the texts being sung. The concert will feature soloists Kirsten Leslie (soprano), A.J. Wester (mezzo soprano), Chad Cygen (tenor) and Rick Ziebarth (bass baritone). “Messiah” scores will be available for purchase.

Voices in Harmony, now in its 26th season, began performing the “Sing-Along Messiah” with the McHenry County College Choir about 15 years ago, Szalaj said.

The orchestra is comprised of local musicians hired specifically for the performance, as are the soloists.

“We always manage to get top-notch soloists, and the soloists we have this year all have local ties,” he said. “They are fine, fine singers and present a highlight to the performance. One of the benefits of the ‘Sing-Along Messiah’ is that people get to sing this great music with an orchestra. It’s music lots of people know and are familiar with. We have a very strong on-stage chorus that helps to lead the audience. People can come and sing, or they can come and listen.”

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Another aspect of the program is that texts by Glen Ellyn calligrapher Timothy Botts will be projected.

“He had a collection where he made calligraphies of the texts of ‘The Messiah,’ and we got permission from him to project those while our concert is going on,” he said. “We project it over the choir, so it becomes a multi-media experience as well. So you have audience participation, orchestra, soloists and projects of the text all to make a very festive and meaningful presentation of Handel’s ‘Messiah.’ It becomes something more than just a fan to sit and listen to the performance. It works on a lot of different levels for a lot of different people. We’re thrilled to be able to present it this way.”

A word to the wise – “The Messiah” isn’t “Jingle Bells.” It’s difficult music, although Szalaj is quick to point out that there are parts that everyone is familiar with, like the “Hallelujah Chorus.”

“And the Glory of the Lord” and “Worthy is the Lamb” are ones that people might recognize as well, he said.

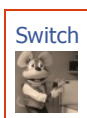
“The presence of the on-stage chorus ... providing good, strong leadership, so if people are less familiar with it they can rely on listening and following what’s going on from the stage,” he said. “We also have an audience conductor who will ... help them with their entrances and things like that.”

Even though they've done this so many times, he said, it's like visiting an old friend.

"People love the expression of it. Handel was a very faith-oriented man, and he himself talked very much about how he felt God's presence guiding his writing while he was composing this piece," he said. "It encompasses not only the Christmas story of Jesus' birth ... but it also goes into the why of that – the salvation story and even beyond that, the hope for our future in the last section where we look forward to the bright future."

He hopes at the end of the show that people feel like they have experienced the true greatness of this music, he said.

"The inspiration, the thrilling sounds, the colors, the powerful message of hope for all of us that comes through this piece – it is ultimately an optimistic, bright piece of music," he said. "When you listen to it all it has such a wonderful positive message for our times."



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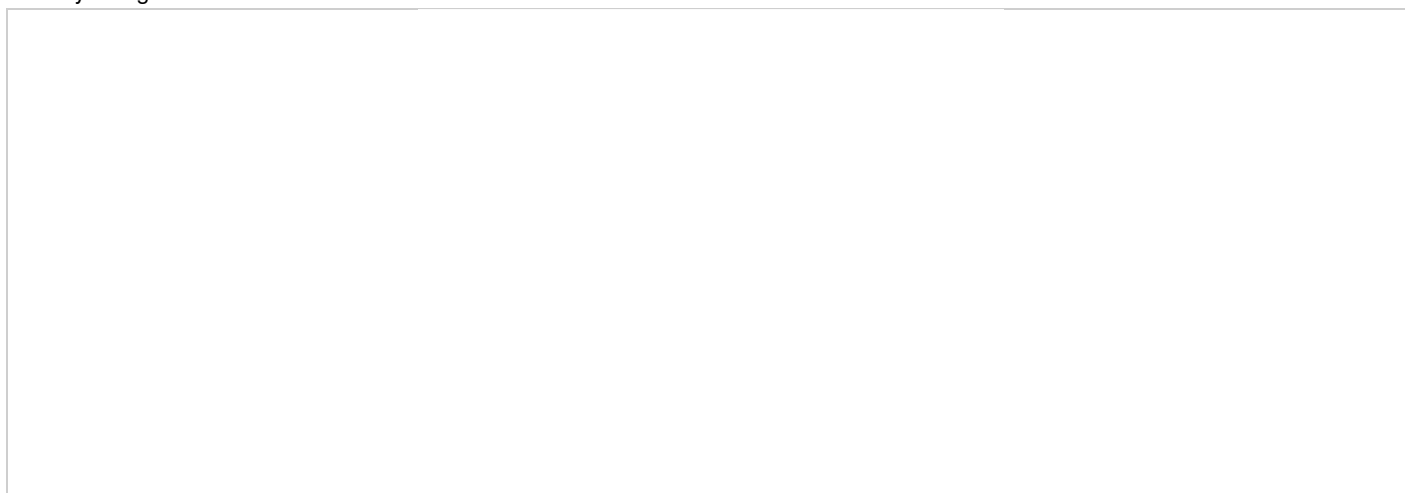
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