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Chicago Master Singers performs Mozart program

By Myrna Petlicki

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Music Director John C. Hughes will conduct Chicago Master Singers in “Mozart’s Mastery” Oct. 29 and 30 at Glenview Community Church. (Ric Damm)

The Chicago Master Singers, under the leadership of Music Director John C. Hughes, will present “Mozart’s Mastery” on Oct. 29 and 30 at Glenview Community Church.

The concert will include two of Mozart’s most acclaimed works, “Requiem” and “Solemn Vespers,” as well as his motet, “Ave Verum Corpus.” The chorus will be accompanied by the Metropolis Symphony Orchestra.

Park Ridge resident Hughes said that he is really looking forward to this concert, which had to be postponed for two years because of the pandemic. He praised Mozart’s music as being “easily identifiable. If you turn on WFMT and you hear a piece playing you almost immediately know if it’s Mozart. It’s not easy to say why he sounds different than another composer of his period, but he does. What makes Mozart Mozart is this kind of joy and playfulness and lightheartedness of his music.”

That even applies to the “Requiem,” which Hughes noted is about the solemnity of death. “There’s still some movements that are kind of warmhearted and even playful,” he explained.

Hughes further praised Mozart’s “Requiem,” calling it “a pinnacle of choral orchestral literature and it’s a true masterpiece. There’s a reason it’s still performed hundreds of years after it was written.”

“Requiem” was a late work by Mozart, who actually died before he completed the piece. One of his students finished it.

On the other hand, “Solemn Vespers” is an early piece, written when Mozart was 23 or 24, according to Hughes. “It has an exuberance and youthfulness to it,” he said.

The Music Director thinks that the two pieces work well together and show Mozart’s talents at different stages of his life.

The concert will feature soloists soprano Michelle Areyzaga, mezzo-soprano Kim Leeds, tenor Klaus Georg, and baritone Keven Keys.

Arlington Heights resident Areyzaga has soloed with Chicago Master Singers many seasons, starting in 2005. “I had a wonderful long-standing professional relationship

with Alan Heatherington (the former music director), and I'm excited to work with Maestro Hughes," she said. "He's wonderful in his own unique way."

She also praised the repertoire of the chorus. "It's a privilege to get to perform these master works with such great singing and playing," Areyzaga said.

The soprano will sing solos in both "Requiem" and "Solemn Vespers."

She said that the first piece "is very familiar to me. I've been performing that for many, many years. That was probably the first piece I ever sang as a professional chorus member."

This will be the first time that Areyzaga has performed the entire "Solemn Vespers."

Areyzaga has also performed at Harris Theatre, Orchestra Hall, and symphonies across the country and in South America.

Hughes praised Areyzaga's talents and said, "It's an honor to finally get to collaborate with her."

This is the first time that Leeds has been a soloist with Chicago Master Singers but her history with the chorus goes back a long way.

"Leeds is an amazing alto who got her start singing in Chicago Master Singers as a teenager," Hughes noted.

"I joined Chicago Master Singers when I was in eighth grade as their youngest member," Leeds said. "And I sang with them all throughout high school. This is kind of cool for me coming back as a professional since they played such a major role in my musical experience and cultivating my love for that genre, classical singing."

Leeds said that she loved the repertoire and had some unforgettable experiences, including touring in Europe with the chorus.

Leeds observed that the Mozart "Requiem" "is such a staple in the oratorio repertoire. I've sung it many times," she said. "It's really impactful writing. The way that he goes back-and-forth between the chorus and the soloists is a beautiful dance between the two. It's cathartic."

This will be the second time that Leeds has performed “Solemn Vespers” as a soloist. “It’s really good vocal writing from the classical era.”

Leeds has performed with the Apollo Choir, the award-winning ensemble Blue Heron, and numerous other acclaimed companies and is also a freelance soloist across the United States.

Hughes also praised the two male soloists.

He said that Georg “can sing in a lot of different styles and does so with an effortless tenor voice.”

Keys “has been a frequent soloist with Chicago Master Singers,” Hughes said. “He has a real sensitivity in his sound.”

Hughes said, “What I really enjoy about Mozart is the sense of play that he has. I think that’s something that audiences have always wanted and that I’m really excited to share with the audience.”

‘Mozart’s Mastery’

When: 7:30 p.m. Oct. 29 and 3 p.m. Oct. 30

Where: Chicago Master Singers at Glenview Community Church, 1000 Elm St., Glenview

Tickets: \$15-\$45

Information: 847-604-1067; chicagomastersingers.org

Myrna Petlicki is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press.

