

Lehigh choral concert celebrates 50 years of female students at the university



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO Lehigh University music department Choral Arts concert, 8 p.m. Oct. 23 and 4 p.m. Oct 24, Baker Hall, Zoellner Arts Center, 420 E. Packer Avenue, Bethlehem.

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SPECIAL TO THE PRESS

Lehigh University's choral ensembles are celebrating the 50th anniversary of female students at the university. The concert, with music from medieval to modern, features the world premiere performance of Steven Sametz's new work, "For The Earth."

The concert includes Theodore Horger Artists-in-Residence, The Princeton Singers, an a cappella ensemble of which Sametz and Sun Min Lee, are directors.

The university music department's Choral Arts returns for the live performance, 8 p.m. Oct. 23 and 4 p.m. Oct 24, Baker Hall, Zoellner Arts Center, 420 E. Packer Avenue, Bethlehem.

There will be approximately 120 performers, including students and the non-student community Choral Union. The concert is expected to be 90 minutes including an intermission.

Singers will perform from around the hall to allow for social distancing. Audience members will be seated according to social-distancing protocol.

In Zoellner, face masks are required for patrons and visitors regardless of vaccination status.

"We're delighted that we're once again able to be live after 18 months of trying to carry the group forward remotely," says Sametz, professor of music at Lehigh.

"It's a tribute to the community that is choral singing. We strove to be together on Zoom and we did some remarkable work over the last year. The students particularly were so thrilled.

"But I also heard from townspeople and the Choral Union about how much they miss this. It's so important in their lives to be singing together.

"The concert itself has a lot of different aspects," says Sametz, who has been at Lehigh for more than 40 years.

The concert opens with a tribute to women. The year 2021 marks the 50th anniversary of undergraduate women's inclusion on campus. Through the spring of 2022, the university is celebrating the contributions and positive impacts made by female students.

Compositions by females in the concert include an 11th century Gregorian chant by Saint Hildegard von Bingen, who was canonized in 2012. Dolce, the university's treble ensemble, will perform the work, as well as pieces by Italian Renaissance-era composer Barbara Strozzi.

There will be Barbershop and modern pieces, including compositions from Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Carolyn Shaw.

There's a mime piece, "Women Make the Earth Move."

"This will include text by Deborah Sacarakis, who was the artistic director for Zoellner Arts Center for many years and brought us the performing arts series," says Sametz.

"The Glee Club will perform sea shanties and renaissance music and a new mime piece, "The Love That I Have,"" says Sametz.

Main Street Brass, a celebrated local quintet, will accompany a piece, "Circus Band," by Connecticut native Charles Ives.

Of the premiere of his "For The Earth," Sametz says, "This piece has surprised me in a lot of great ways."

The genesis of "For The Earth" began during remote learning sessions and a collaboration with Voices 21 C, a Boston choir. Voices 21 C is devoted to identify and pursue human rights through global understanding through music.

"It's a remarkable group and we're privileged to be able to work with them," says Sametz.

"The hot button issue for this generation of college students is climate change. So, we crafted a story around that."

Students created a storyline about a dystopian future where the earth's atmosphere was destroyed. It includes a scientific elder who tried to warn people about the dangers of climate change.

"For me, that story set an inspiration in emotion. I found a lot of texts to create a libretto."

The texts range from those of ancient Maya to ancient China, to Biblical texts, to the writings of Walt Whitman.

The piece evolved as Sametz received clips from the two choral groups from which he created a tapestry of sound.

Tickets: Zoellner box office, two hours prior to concert; www.zoellner.cas.lehigh.edu; 610-758-2787, ext. 0