

Choral Group Aims to Please Community

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Fun and service might as well be the watchwords for Masterworks Choral Ensemble this year. The group has a season of crowd-pleasing singing in the works, and there are new plans for giving back to the community, too.

The ensemble's abbreviation, MCE, "for us over the past few years has also become an acronym for music, community and education," director Gary Witley said.

Masterworks is making good on that mission with a new venture in which it will highlight and give donations to four community groups.

Each of the four main concerts will shine the spotlight on one of the groups, with the four splitting donations at the end of the season.

At the year's first program -- "Autumn: Celtic Connections" on Oct. 11 -- Masterworks has two special guest ensembles: the Celtic band Fiddlehead and Olympia's Comerford School of Irish Dance. They will combine with Masterworks to present an evening of toe-tapping music from the Celtic regions. The featured community group is Boys and Girls Clubs of Thurston County.

On Dec. 6, "Winter: Musical Traditions" features a modern cantata called "The Incarnation" by K. Scott Lee, along with a selection of holiday favorites. The organization in the spotlight is Community Youth Services' Haven House.

"I was looking for something that was more out of the ordinary," Witley said of "The Incarnation." "It really is evocative of peace and serenity."

"Spring Time: Modern Style," on April 18, features "The Sprig of Thyme" by John Rutter. Witley called it "sort of a collection of English folk songs." It will be paired with "Lux Perpetua" by modern English composer Jonathan Willcocks, which Witley called "a very emotional work about the significance of peace and unity in our lives." SafePlace is the spotlighted group.

Well-known stage works take the spotlight June 20 in "Summer: Show Tunes," showcasing songs from Tony-winning shows. Although the specific songs are being selected, Witley said they'll include pieces from "South Pacific," "Rent," "Monty Python's Spamalot" and "Avenue Q." The concert will feature the Spotlite Foundation.

In addition, Masterworks presents the annual Northwest Regional Harmony Sweepstakes A Cappella Festival on March 7. This year's winner, The Baudboys, an ensemble of eight guys from Microsoft, returns to host. Like the rest of their concerts, the fest is at 7:30 p.m. at The Washington Center for the Performing Arts, 512 Washington St. S.E., Olympia.

"They're just really lots of fun," Witley said. "It's always a sellout."