Redding residents perform with Connecticut Master Chorale

By Pamela Brown



Connecticut Master Chorale member Sheila Corr is from Redding. The choir performs November 22.



Photos courtesy of Tina Johns Heidrich

Bobby Bria is one of three Redding residents in the Connecticut Master Chorale. The ensemble of some 55 performers shines during the holidays.



Angela Caes is one of three Redding members of the choir.

The holidays become more joyful when festive music fills the air.

Every year, the Connecticut Master Chorale brings forth this holiday spirit. Under the direction of Tina Johns Heidrich, the premier ensemble is presenting its 26th annual Holiday Prelude Concert featuring the theme of 'Rejoice' at First Congregational Church in Danbury.

"Our concert has become an annual tradition for many of our regular audience members who have met through the Chorale and become friends," Heidrich said. "We always schedule this concert the Sunday before Thanksgiving to help everyone get into the holiday mood ahead of the traffic jam of events scheduled throughout December."

An ensemble of 55 professional-caliber vocalists will be accompanied by the Connecticut Master Chorale Holiday Brass and Joseph Jacovino on piano. "Some music is serious, some whimsical, some familiar, some new, but always in interesting and unusual arrangements, which makes each concert a bit of an adventure," Heidrich said. Unlike other concert directors, she added, she loves to "mix with the audience both before and after the concert…I'm also known to make amusing remarks from the podium."

Three Redding residents are longtime members of the Chorale, including Bobby Bria, Angela Caes, and Sheila Corr. "Each Chorale member brings their own talents and contributes in their own unique way," Heidrich said. "Bobby joined us in 2012 and serves as our Operations Manager. At the concert, he's the one at the podium greeting the audience. Angela owns her own travel agency but still finds the time to make the commitment to the Chorale. Sheila joined in 2003 and has never missed a concert."

Corr, a 30-year Redding resident, is a first soprano, the highest voice part. "I love the variety of pieces that we perform in this concert including various musical styles, tempos, and feelings," she said. "It's rewarding to be part of this group of 55 auditioned singers that can perform complex and beautiful arrangements, and create a sound that touches both the audience and the singers. My favorite piece is "Rejoice! [Christ is Born]" which incorporates ten different Christmas carols. My wish is for all of the Redding community to find a way to rejoice this holiday season."

The afternoon offers selections for Advent, Christmas, and Hanukkah, along with winter season carols featuring gospel, jazz, and swing. "We try to cover many holidays to bring diversity to the musical styles, and we also perform pieces that are more seasonal in nature," Heidrich said. "We don't often include New Year music, but this year we have a touching traditional arrangement of "Auld Lang Syne," which is the original Robert Burns version in a new arrangement by Dan Forrest." The concert will take attendees on "An Eastern European Holiday" with music from Romania, Russia, Slovakia, and the "Carol of the Bells" from Ukraine.

The program will open with a brass fanfare in "Rejoice! Christ Is Born," an exultant medley of traditional carols. Other highlights include "Seasons," Norwegian composer Ola Gjeilo's evocative work exploring seasonal changes; "Mistletoe and Holly," a 1950s pop tune co-written and recorded by Frank Sinatra with a nostalgic swing arrangement for chorus and big band; and "Look Who Just Checked In" by gospel singer-songwriters Daryl Williams and Stephen Hill. "Something to Shout About," from the musical *Christmas is Jesus*, closes out the program.

"We always finish with a rousing number that leaves everyone feeling excited," Heidrich said. "The title says it all. and it will have everyone clapping and dancing in the aisles."

Bria, a 54-year Redding resident, sings Tenor 1. His favorite piece is "Seasons." "This concert gets me in the holiday spirit," he said. "Tina always selects the most incredible pieces to sing. There is always a wonderful variety of styles, and Tina's passion is contagious. The concert is an amazing day full of uplifting, energetic, and thought-provoking music. You'll be smiling at the beauty throughout the performance, and tapping your toes, too."

Caes, a 19-year Redding resident, has been a member since 2007. "What's better than kicking off the holiday season with music? For me, the two go hand-in-hand," she said. "I love having the chance to perform a rich, diverse mix of pieces each year. My heart has always belonged to ensemble singing, from intimate 24-voice groups to the full CT Master Chorale. I've always sung alto, with a range best described as mezzo-soprano. I'm a huge fan of the composer Pink Zebra, so I'm excited that we're performing their piece, "December in My Home Town.""

Bria encourages the Redding community to attend. "You'll be thrilled that you did!" Caes agrees. "Redding always finds its voice through the arts. Between holiday concerts, singing with the cows at New Pond Farm, gathering for the town tree lighting, and celebrating local artists at the Mark Twain Library, there are no dark winter nights here, only the warmth of art, family, and community." ■

The performance takes place on November 22 at 3:00 p.m. at 164 Deer Hill Avenue in Danbury. To purchase tickets, visit: cmchorale.org or call (203) 740-9533. Venue is handicap accessible. Doors open at 2:15 p.m.

