

Salt Lake choir gets vocal at church

Story by Linda East Brady , Standard-Examiner staff - Dec 16 2011 - 1:57am

The Salt Lake Vocal Artists have traveled the world and triumphed in contests of vocal skill abroad. However, the program coming on Saturday to Holy Family Catholic Church marks their first visit to Ogden.

"We wanted to go to Ogden for quite a while, but haven't had the opportunity to. This show sort of happened last-minute," said Brady Allred, who as artistic director of Salt Lake Choral Artists oversees the Vocal Artists performing choir and others ensembles under the SLCA banner.

The mother of one of Allred's choir members teaches and organizes music shows in Ogden; she was making holiday arrangements for the church.

"And I had been to Holy Family, because I know Brett Patterson, the organist there, and was impressed with the space. We talked about trying to work this out -- and then the stars aligned and we were able to do this concert.

"It looks like a beautiful space for choral singing. I am really looking forward to it."

Touring ambassadors

Allred moved to Salt Lake City eight years ago. He had led an organization similar to SLCA in Pittsburgh, and hoped to get something similar going here.

An existing Salt Lake City choral organization, the Legacy Chorale, was looking for a conductor. When Allred took the helm, he changed the name to the Salt Lake Choral Artists.

"I started with a small 60-voice mixed choir. I knew that, as the organization grew, I wanted many different choirs so people at all levels and ability could participate."

Seven years later, the SLCA has a 150-voice concert choir that sings major works of orchestra, with 50 voices then drawn from the bigger group that sings as a chamber choir. The organization also has a women's choir and two children's groups.

Allred launched the advanced choir, the Salt Lake Vocal Artists, just over two years ago, with the idea of using the group as international ambassadors for music from Utah.

"They are the touring choir. They traveled to Spain a year ago, and competed in an international choir competition at Tolosa, in the Basque region, and we entered four categories of the five we could enter."

They won all four categories -- nods for vocal ensemble, secular and sacred music, and mixed choir, polyphony and folk music.

"We also won the audience prize," Allred said. "That was a very successful first attempt."

Then the group was invited to Argentina this summer, representing the United States in another international competition that, like a vocal Olympics, occurs every three years in various parts of the world.

"We were the only American choir invited to participate," Allred said. "And recently we returned to Italy, and again ... we won five first prizes. So Salt Lake City had gotten quite a show on the world choir stage."

A festival at home?

Allred said he thinks Utah is in a unique position to start its own international choir festival, with an audience well-versed in the ways of choral music, and the talent as well. He hopes to get a festival going in the next two years.

"We have the audience for it, and we have all our great choir spaces," said Allred. "We can have a big event with the Tabernacle Choir and even have a competitive aspect for those who want to do that."

Of course, as suits the season, the Vocal Artists will sing holiday and seasonal favorites at the Ogden show. They've released a new album of Christmas music, "Never a Brighter Star," which will be available post-show and at the SLCA website, www.saltlakechoralartists.org. The program itself includes favorites as well as those from the new release, songs like "Caroling, Caroling," "Do You Hear What I Hear?," "Deck the Halls (in 7/8)" and "Carol of the Bells."

Allred said he is not only proud of his award-winning Vocal Artists, but he is equally delighted with his less-experienced singers.

"For this more advanced group, singers have to prepare a vocal solo, have their range checked, the agility of the voice, sight-reading skills -- I can usually tell pretty quickly if their voice is in shape for the rigors of the advanced group. They have to be ready.

"One the other hand, I want anyone who wants to sing to get to, and that is why we have so many groups. In the women's group and the children's chorus, we give them more technical guidance and ideas in rehearsal, so they can improve.

"And every year, people move around and sing in different groups as they get better and learn more. This is also a great way to musically educate people."