

Bach Choir of Bethlehem announces 2020 virtual Christmas concert program

By MORNING CALL STAFF

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The Bach Choir of Bethlehem will spend the next several weeks rehearsing and then video recording its first virtual Christmas concert amid pandemic safety measures.

“Opening Up Our Hearts: The Music and Inspiration of Christmas” will combine seasonal music with spoken word poetry and sacred texts, according to a news release. It will be recorded in Nazareth and Bethlehem. The program will be free.

The new release says the concert will offer people a way to “gather” with friends and family to enjoy the program together.



The Bach Choir of Bethlehem will present a virtual concert "Opening Up Our Hearts: The Music and Inspiration of Christmas" combining seasonal music with spoken word poetry and sacred texts. (Ryan Hulvat/CONTRIBUTED photo)

Long-time director Greg Funfgeld said the concert will feel "like Christmas." "The human voice is a miracle and a marvel — it expresses the most profound thoughts and beauty, carries the heart and soul of the singers to the heart and soul of the listeners and create a bond that is life-giving, uplifting, sustaining," Funfgeld said at the start of the choir's season. "This bond will be as strong as ever this year with the virtual connections we make through this performance."

The "Opening Up Our Hearts" concert will feature about 65 choir members performing outdoors in Nazareth. The repertoire will include Robert Parsons' "Ave Maria," traditional favorites including "Go Tell It On The Mountain" and "Ding Dong Merrily On High" as well as the choir's traditional closing "Silent Night." "Our audience joins us in this favorite carol each year and we hope everyone will sing together at home as the concert concludes," the news release said.

The Bel Canto Youth Chorus will also record an outdoor performance of "Up Above My Head," conducted by Joy Hirokawa. Additional music will be recorded at Bethlehem's Central Moravian Church. Soloists include Nola Richardson, soprano; Meg Bragle, mezzo-soprano; Lawrence Jones, tenor; Christopheren Nomura, bass-baritone; Robin Kani, flute; and Greg Funfgeld, organ and piano.

The program will include arias from Bach's "Christmas Oratorio" and soloist performances including "O Holy Night" and "I Wonder as I Wander."

Sacred text and spoken word messages of hope will range from St. Luke's Gospel on the birth of Jesus to a passage from Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." The concert is free, but viewers must register online to receive a link to watch. The recorded program will be available on [the choir's YouTube channel](#) and [Facebook page](#). More information is available at bach.org/event/christmas/. Free will donations are appreciated, according to event organizers.

Choir rehearsals are being held outdoors for small groups of singers until late October, when the group will gather — for the first time since March — to rehearse outdoors. Indoor performances will feature a small ensemble of soloists and instrumentalists. All rehearsals and recorded performances will follow COVID-19 safety protocols.

Morning Call Arts & Entertainment Editor Craig Larimer can be reached at 610-778-7993 or at clarimer@mcall.com