

# Bach Choir of Bethlehem announces virtual concert

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The Bach Choir of Bethlehem has spent the last few months rehearsing, recording and editing its first ever virtual Christmas Concert, titled “Opening Up Our Hearts: Music and Inspiration of Christmas.”

Combining seasonal music with the spoken word of poetry and sacred texts, the choir will present this program taped in Nazareth and Bethlehem free to all who register online to view it. The concert offers people a way to “gather” friends and family near and far who also attend the YouTube “Watch Party” as they open up their own hearts through the words and music of this beautiful concert.

Following the concert’s YouTube premiere, the performance will air on WFMZ-TV Channel 69 twice: at 7 p.m. on Dec. 19 and again on Christmas Eve at 10 p.m.

With many in the Arts community still shuttered and “dark,” the choir remains under the guidance of Greg Funfgeld, who will lead his choir and soloists with enormous passion and enthusiasm, delivering a concert to viewers that “feels like Christmas.”

As he noted at the start of our season, “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 creates a bond that is life giving, uplifting, sustaining.”

“Opening Up Our Hearts” began with choir rehearsals held outdoors for several weeks, bringing together small groups of six to eight singers.

After 52 small group rehearsals, in late October some 65 choir members gathered as one for the first time since March to rehearse and record together outdoors in Nazareth, all following strict COVID-19 protocols for safety.

Repertoire includes Robert Parsons’ “Ave Maria” and traditional favorites including “Go Tell It on the Mountain” and “Ding Dong Merrily on High.”

As is the annual tradition, the concert will close with a stunning and transcendent arrangement of “Silent Night.”

The Bel Canto Youth Chorus also recorded an energetic and lively outdoor performance for the concert - “Up Above My Head,” conducted by Joy Hirokawa.

Additional music has been recorded in Bethlehem at Central Moravian Church. Soloists include Nola Richardson, soprano; Meg Bragle, mezzo-soprano; Lawrence Jones, tenor; David Newman, bass; and Bach Festival Orchestra Members Elizabeth Field, violin, Loretta O’Sullivan, cello, Charles Holdeman, bassoon, Stephen Groat, string bass, Robin Kani, flute, Nobuo Kitagawa, oboe and oboe d’amore and Greg Funfgeld, organ and piano.

In addition to arias from Bach’s Christmas Oratorio, soloist performances include “O Holy Night” and “I Wonder As I Wander.”

Adding to the program will be several intervals of sacred text and spoken word, all delivering messages of hope - from St. Luke’s Gospel on the birth of Jesus to a passage from Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol”; to thought-provoking poetry, including “Christmas II” by George Hebert and “The Work of Christmas,” by Howard Thurman.

The concert is free and open to all but viewers must register online to receive a link to view. It will be available through the choir’s YouTube channel.

More information is available at <https://bach.org/event/christmas>. Free will donations to help offset the cost of production will be accepted.