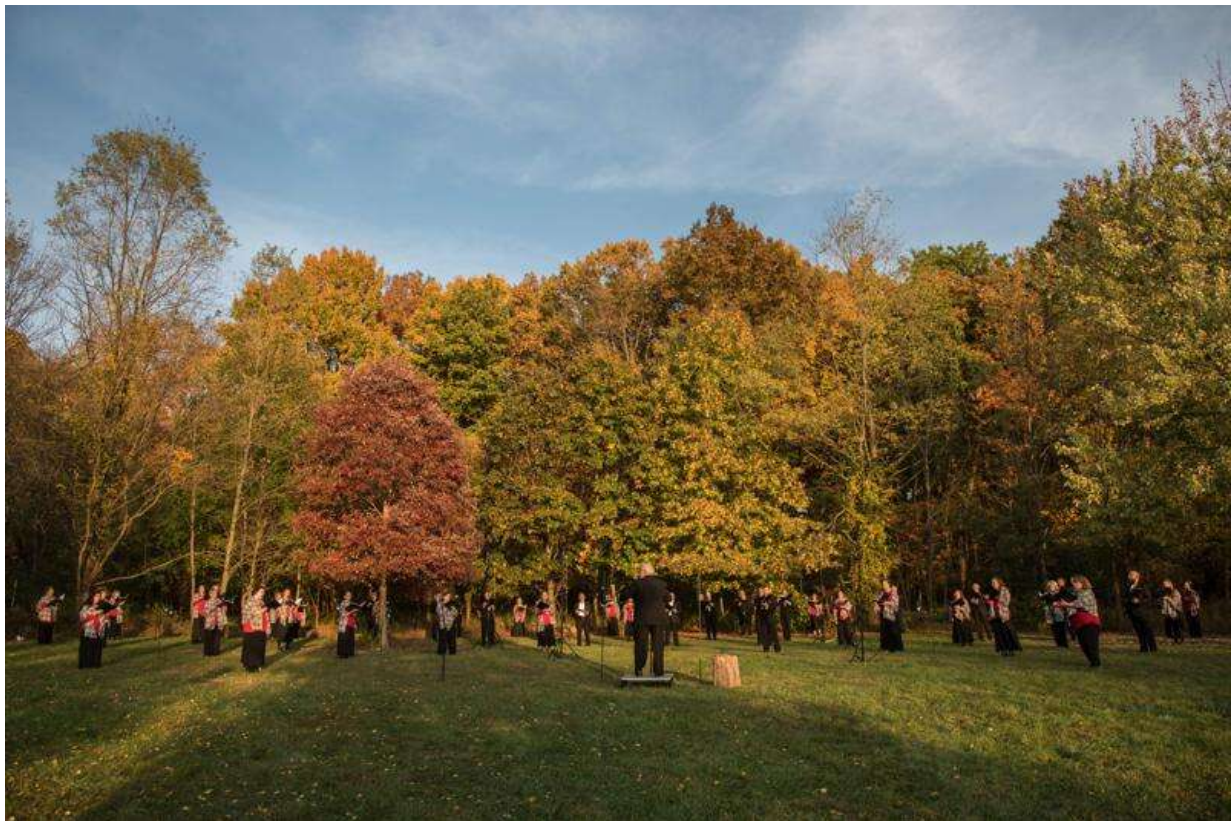


Concert Review: Bach Choir Christmas concert virtually- wonderful



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY HUB WILLSON The Bach Choir of Bethlehem “Opening Up Our Hearts - Music and Inspiration of Christmas,” portions of which took place at Little Pond Retreat, Moore Township, near Nazareth, is available on YouTube.

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SPECIAL TO THE PRESS

In the Bach Choir of Bethlehem’s first-ever virtual concert, the group delivers an inspiring and uplifting holiday experience.

Faced with the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that made it impossible to hold its traditional in-person Christmas concert, the choir put together the delightful “Opening Up Our Hearts - Music and Inspiration of Christmas.”

The concert, which can be viewed on the choir’s YouTube channel, showcases choir and soloists, interspersed with holiday season readings against the festive backdrop of the Christmas City of Bethlehem.

The concert opens with a glorious rendition of the traditional French carol, “Ding Dong Merrily on High,” sung by the 65-member choir led enthusiastically by Bach Choir of Bethlehem Artistic Director and Conductor Greg Funfgeld.

To observe COVID protocol, choir members stood 10 feet apart in a large clearing at Little Pond Retreat high on a hill in Moore Township near Nazareth.

Despite the challenges of recording outdoors, the audio of the choir is excellent. The video images soar above via a drone and move among the singers, giving viewers a never-before seen view of the choir.

Next is a lovely and haunting performance by the choir of Robert Parsons’ “Ave Maria.”

Instrumental music is followed by a reading of the Gospel of St. Luke by Bishop Hopeton Clennon, Senior Pastor, Central Moravian Church, Bethlehem.

The choir performs the spiritual, “Go Tell It on the Mountain,” featuring an impassioned solo by tenor Lane Conklin McCord.

Adding a playful touch is the Bel Canto Youth Chorus, directed by Joy Hirokawa, performing the Gospel song, “Up Above My Head,” while romping around outdoors at Little Pond.

Soloists performing in the charmingly-decorated Central Moravian Church are outstanding.

Tenor Lawrence Jones has wonderful clear tones on the aria from Bach’s “Christmas Oratorio,” BWV 248, Part 2, and on “Dies Natalis” (“Day of Birth”), Gerald Finzi’s setting of a poem by Thomas Traherne.

Meg Bragle delivers a memorable mezzo-soprano aria from the “Christmas Oratorio” and is especially lovely on the Appalachian carol, “I Wonder as I Wander.”

Nola Richardson brings her soaring soprano to “The Virgin’s Slumber Song” and “As Joseph Was A-Walking.”

Bass David Newman gives a profound resonance to an aria from the “Christmas Oratorio” and “O Holy Night.”

Elizabeth Field provides sparkling violin on Bach’s “Concerto for Violin in A Minor.” Other instrumental soloists who give top-notch performances are Loretta O’Sullivan, cello; Stephen Groat, bass; Nobuo Kitagawa, oboe d’amore; Robin Kani, flute, and Funfgeld, piano.

The choir continues its longstanding tradition of ending its Christmas concert with Franz Xaver Gruber’s “ Silent Night.”

It’s a wonderful and unforgettable hour of beautiful music, as befitting the season.

The concert was telecast Dec. 24 on WFMZ-TV.

To view the concert: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgqJEjbpY8>