

Things to Do: Bach Choir presents virtual Christmas concert

- Kathy Lauer-Williams

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It has been since March, the last time the Bach Choir of Bethlehem sang together, but in October, the choir's 65 members got together for the first time in more than six months at Little Pond Arts in Moore Township, Northampton County, where the group – socially distanced and outdoors - recorded music for its first-ever virtual Christmas concert.

The choir's concert, "Opening Up Our Hearts: The Music and Inspiration of Christmas," will premiere online at 4 p.m. on Sunday.

The event is the result of 52 separate rehearsal sessions of small groups of eight led by choir director Greg Funfgeld.

The program includes Robert Parsons' "Ave Maria;" traditional favorite "Ding Dong Merrily on High;" "Go Tell It on the Mountain;" as arranged by Paul Sjolund; and the choir's traditional concert closer, Franz Xaver Gruber's "Silent Night."

Also recorded at Little Pond on a separate day was a performance of "Up Above My Head," sung by the Bel Canto Youth Chorus, conducted by Joy Hirokawa, which will be included in the concert.

Additional music by soloists and instrumentalist has been recorded in Bethlehem at Central Moravian Church. Soloists include Nola Richardson, soprano; Meg Bragle, mezzo-soprano; Lawrence Jones, tenor; and David Newman, bass-baritone.

In addition to arias from Bach's "Christmas Oratorio," soloist performances include "O Holy Night" and "I Wonder as I Wander." Funfgeld asked soloists to perform Christmas favorites of their choosing, "to offer a program that elicits the warmth of the season for our audience."

Instrumentalists include Robin Kani, flute; Elizabeth Field, violin; Loretta O'Sullivan, cello; Mary Watt and Nobuo Kitagawa, oboes and oboe's d'amore; Chuck Holdeman, bassoon and Funfgeld on organ and piano.

Adding to the program are sacred text and spoken word, including St. Luke's Gospel, read by Bishop C. Hopeton Clennon in downtown Bethlehem. Also included is a passage from Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," and poetry such as "Christmas II" by George Hebert and "The Work of Christmas" by Howard Thurman.

The concert is free, but viewers must register [online](#) to receive a link to view. It will be available through the choir's [YouTube channel](#) and [Facebook page](#). Free-will donations to help offset the cost of production are appreciated.

So far, there have been more than 1,000 registrations from 44 states and eight countries.

The concert also will be shown on 69-WFMZ-TV on Dec. 19 at 7 p.m. and on Christmas Eve, Dec. 24, at 10 p.m.