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Summer Choral Institute: All together now

Expanding program aims to inspire choral artists and spread work of Utah composers throughout the world.

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The Salt Lake Choral Artists' annual Summer Choral Institute could grow into a big festival like Massachusetts' Berkshire Choral Festival, bringing people from around the globe to spend summers singing in Utah, if conductor Brady Allred has his way. He also envisions a major international choral competition based in Utah.

These are bold dreams, but not ones to be discounted -- because Brady Allred seems to get his way.

Allred, head of the University of Utah's choral music activities, has attracted major funding to his university department, and elevated singing at the U. and in the community through his Salt Lake Choral Artists. He recently returned from Europe, where he conducted the University Singers as they won first prize at a world-famous chamber choir competition in Marktoberdorf, Germany. The group has won international choir competitions in France and Spain under his baton in recent years.

"People over there want to know what's in the water in Utah," Allred said, acknowledging the state's long history of fine choirs.

The SLCA Summer Choral Institute, now in its third year, is Allred's way of giving choral musicians the means to perform choral music. Singers can sign up for one or more of the weekend sessions, each of which culminates in a public concert.

The institute also includes reading sessions, a choir camp for children, and conducting workshops offering amateur and professional conductors the chance to learn Allred's methods for training choirs.

The event has expanded in each year of existence, a trend Allred intends to continue. New this year is a July session just for women's voices, recognizing Utah's strong community of women's choirs. "Girls' Night Out" culminates in performances of popular folk music, Broadway show tunes and Gustav Holst's "Hymns from the Rig Veda" with harp accompaniment.

Another new spin is a weekend retreat for high-school madrigal and chambers choirs just before school begins in August. "Teachers can bring the new chamber choirs and madrigal groups they auditioned before the last school year ended," Allred said. "It's an organized way for them to come and get choirs ready for the year -- sort of a way to train them quickly."

The choirs will join forces for work with Allred and his staff, and work as individual units in breakout sessions. The final concert features music from the individual choirs and selections for the combined choir.

As in the past, music of Utah composers is championed during the Summer Choral Institute, but the focus has expanded. In addition to a reading session of Mack Wilberg's Requiem, an entire session revolves around music by Utahns: Wilberg, Ronald Staheli, Thomas Durham, David Naylor, Cameron Rose, Jane Fjelsted, Marie Nelson Bennett, Murray Boren and others. The session concludes with performances at Libby Gardner Concert Hall and the Cathedral of the Madeleine.

That focus is aimed to introduce the world to music by Utah composers by performing and recording their works. The first of those recordings, featuring music of David Naylor, has been produced, and more are under way, Allred said.

Naylor, who writes children's operas for Logan's Utah Festival Opera as his main employment, values his relationship with Salt Lake Choral Artists. "It's not lost on me that Utah composers very seldom get this sort of exposure, especially from someone so world-renowned as Brady," he said. "It's a huge honor for me. I think this is a marvelous idea he has, of highlighting Utah composers."

Getting the music from Utah out into the world is important to Allred, but his big dream is to bring the finest choral musicians of the world to Utah. "After my recent experience at this competition and festival in Germany, I feel strongly that down the road I'd like to organize an international festival and competition here that could attract choirs from all over the world," Allred said. "We can start to build bridges all over the world through choral singing."

Salt Lake Choral Artists' Summer Choral Institute

The 2009 event, conducted by Brady Allred, includes instruction and performances for singers of all ages and conducting workshops at Gardner Hall on the University of Utah campus in Salt Lake City. Here is the schedule:

Choral sessions

June 25-27 » Patriotic music from the USA, featuring a performance with the 23rd Army Band. \$75; \$50 for students and seniors; \$30 music fee.

July 7 » Reading session -- music of Rodgers and Hammerstein. 7 p.m.; \$10; \$30 music fee.

July 9-11 » Choral music for women; performance includes harp accompaniment. \$65; \$45 for students and seniors; \$25 music fee.

July 14 » Reading session -- Requiem by Mack Wilberg. 7 p.m.; \$10; \$20 music fee.

July 13-19 » Elementary and junior high school day camp in cooperation with the Cathedral of the Madeleine Choir School. Concludes with a Saturday evening concert in Libby Gardner Concert Hall and a Sunday performance at the Cathedral of the Madeleine. \$165 for grades 4-8 full day; \$80 for grades 4-8 half-day; \$90 for grades 2-3 half day; music fee 4-8 only) \$20; \$20 lunch fee.

July 16-19 » Music of Utah composers: This session for adult singers includes performances at Libby Gardner Concert Hall and the Cathedral of the Madeleine alongside the youth choir. \$65; \$45 for students and seniors; \$25 music fee.

Aug. 4 » Reading session --- Magnificat by John Rutter. 7 p.m.; \$10; \$20 music fee.

Aug. 6-8 » "Psalmfest," by John Rutter, including a performance with Salt Lake Choral Artists Chamber Choir and Chamber Orchestra and soloists. \$70; \$50 for students and seniors; \$30 music fee.

Aug. 11 » Reading session: Sing with the Salt Lake Choral Artists as they read through selected repertoire for their 2009-10 season, including selections from the Rachmaninoff Vespers, Lauridsen's "Lux Aeterna," Ramirez's "Navidad Nuestra," songs of the Beatles and American folk music. 7 p.m.; \$10; \$30 music fee.

Aug. 13-15 » High-school chamber choir/madrigal retreat -- A session for school choirs and their conductors, including social events and a performance featuring each group and a combined choir. High-

school students can also register individually. (Lodging on campus is also available.)

Choral conducting workshops with Brady Allred for church, school and community conductors
(noncredit)

June 22-26 » Beginning and intermediate -- \$300; \$25 music fee.

July 13-18 » Intermediate and advanced -- \$300; \$25 music fee.

For exact times and locations, and information about registering, visit www.saltlakechoralartists.org.