

Grandmother and Granddaughter, 8, Among Area Singers in Stockton's 'Messiah'

Concert Rescheduled for Jan. 26 at Xanadu Theater in Trump Taj Mahal

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Galloway Township, NJ- A grandmother from Egg Harbor Township and her 8-year-old granddaughter join singers from throughout the region gearing up for a rescheduled performance of The Messiah, produced by The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and set for **Sunday, Jan. 26.**

Karen Aspenberg and her granddaughter, Myranda, who live in Egg Harbor Township, are looking forward to being part of the 7:30 p.m. performance of Handel's masterpiece at the Xanadu Theater at Trump Taj Mahal in Atlantic City.

"We were actually on our way to dress rehearsal (Dec. 8) when we were told it was canceled," Aspenberg recalled. "Myranda cried. But now she's excited that we're going to have it again."

Aspenberg, who sings in a gospel choir at church, has been singing in Stockton's "Messiah" for several years, and this is Myranda's first time. "I love the music, I just enjoy the community coming together," said Aspenberg.

Beverly Vaughn, professor of Music at Stockton and director of the Stockton Chorale & Oratorio Society, said, "We feel so fortunate and excited to have another opportunity to present this magnificent work - now at the beginning of a new year! The enthusiasm and sound of the choir members who sang during our first rehearsal last Monday night (Jan. 6) brought tears to my eyes."

She invited members of the public who want to participate to come to rehearsals or attend the show.

"I believe this performance will be very special with deep meaning for our entire community," Vaughn said.

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The production brings together people from all over the region, including Preston Forchion, owner of one of the deepest bass voices you'll ever hear. "People come up to me in restaurants and say, 'I love your voice,'" he said. "My wife finds it annoying sometimes."

Forchion is retired and lives in Sickerville in Camden County, but works part-time for Hammonton's Via Bus company.

He said he had sometimes driven gamblers to casinos in Atlantic City, then dropped in on a Stockton Oratorio rehearsal in Atlantic City. Later he picked up his customers and drove them back home.

"I'm an 18-year veteran with the Stockton Oratorio Society," said Forchion. "I learned 'The Messiah' and sang it for the first time in 1996, because we do it every other year," he explained.

Sally Russell and her daughter, Sarah, who live in Hamilton Township, will be singing, and Sarah will also be dancing and signing during the production.

Sarah, 36, is working on a sign language degree and is a dancer who has performed with various area dance troupes including Atlantic City Ballet and the Paul Morris DanceXplosion group in Hammonton, her mother said.

Sally, a former teacher and bookkeeper, now keeps busy as a seamstress. She said she has been involved with Stockton's 'Messiah' concerts for decades, and her daughter "decided to tag along with her mother when she was still in high school."

So what does being in The Messiah mean to them?

"To me that's what Christmas is all about – Christ. It's one of the songs I have loved since I was little. Not just the Hallelujah chorus, the whole thing," Sally said.

Even though the concert had to be postponed till after Christmas, Russell said she's still in the spirit.

"I grew up in an area where Christmas started on Christmas Eve and ended at the end of January," she explained. "Really Orthodox people go almost to the end of the month. We never put our tree up until Christmas Eve and then you went through January."

Aspenberg, Forchion and Russell all commented on Professor Vaughn's contribution to the event.

"I love watching her direct – she's very animated. She's phenomenal as far as a director and I have been under many directors," Russell said. "She can pull the music out of you."

"Beverly Vaughn is a very unique lady," said Forchion. "What I love about her is her energy and I like the way - when she realizes that we're not singing with the right gusto or enthusiasm – she will break it down and tell us the meaning of it from the Bible... and it means more to you now.

"I don't even call it rehearsal, I call it music class" he said. "She IS a professor."

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Vaughn urged anyone who's interested in being part of the concert – even if they hadn't been part of the previously scheduled show – to come to open rehearsals. Rehearsals are being held Jan. 13 and Jan. 20, 2014 from 7 to 8:45 p.m. in the Alton Auditorium on the second floor of the A-Wing of Stockton's main Galloway campus.

For more information about participating in the performance, please contact Brian Lyons in the School of Arts and Humanities at Brian.Lyons@stockton.edu, (609) 652-4891.

Tickets previously purchased for the concert canceled due to snow will be re-issued.

Tickets are \$8-\$12 and are available at Stockton's Performing Arts Center Box Office at (609) 652-9000 or online at the [PAC](#). The Box Office is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the M-Wing of the college's main campus at 101 Vera King Farris Drive, Galloway, NJ

Tickets will also be available at the door of the Xanadu Theater in Trump Taj Mahal on the night of the performance. A portion of the proceeds will benefit scholarships for Stockton students.

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