

Light Up Midwinter with the Kulshan Chorus

by Margaret Bikman

The Kulshan Chorus presents *Light Is Returning* at 7:30pm on January 4 at Mount Baker Theatre, 104 N. Commercial St. in Bellingham. Artistic director Dustin Willetts has chosen several songs, which present stories of triumph over adversity, including works by award-winning composer Jake Runestad, Craig Hella Johnson, Pentatonix, and Gawthrop. Tickets, which range from \$20 to \$25, are available at <http://bit.ly/358xT7P> or by calling 360-734-6080. For more information on the choir, visit www.kulshanchorus.org.



Willetts (pictured) believes that “a live performance of ensemble work is the highest art form. It’s a bold statement yes, but where else in life can one find a room full of people — 150 in fact — to work on something together. Moreover, those 150 people think differently, and come from different backgrounds and lifestyles.”

Vermeda M. Fred believes that the program in January conveys the message that, even in the dark of winter, we have the power to love and to give, and that this power and our actions do make a difference.



Saragrace Wyckoff explains that the Kulshan Chorus, a non-profit, mostly self-funded organization, is an intergenerational, secular choir that is committed to music education, outreach, and community building.

“We don’t shy away from really saying something with our music,” she says.

“The Kulshan Chorus takes risks in the selections that they sing,” says Fran Maas, who’s sung with the choir for 24 years.

Sherrie Montgomery echoes that thought and adds, “I think because we take on difficult subject matters that affect society, we’ve become Whatcom County’s ‘peace and justice choir.’ We’ve performed at Martin Luther King, Jr. ceremonies pretty consistently for decades since its inception in Bellingham. Our Breaking Silence performance a few seasons ago was awarded a Whatcom County Peace Builder award; that performance focused on the abuse and harm done to women in our society.”

In fact, one of the recipients of Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center’s 2019 Peace Builder Awards is Peace Wizard John C. Bromet, for the Inspiration Award, because he spreads the message of peace wherever he goes. He can be seen frequently around our area carrying his gigantic peace sign, which he’s also taken on choir tours around the world.

“We take what we do seriously and have superior expectations of ourselves,” says Miriam Davids.

Indeed, Vermeda Fred says that it may be hard to appreciate when you are in the audience that the singers spend hours upon hours learning and perfecting their music. “We work at home, on our own, as well as in sectional groups, and finally, in weekly and twice-weekly all-chorus rehearsals. Small groups and bands also rehearse separately. We spend these hours because we love what we do, but also because we want to be the best we

can possibly be for each and every person who chooses to spend their evening with us.”

“That’s the cherry that tops the cake,” agrees Willetts. “We sing for you. We sing to honor our gifts and to make you think. We sing because it is good, and so is humanity. We spread light and joy. This is why we do what we do.”

Sonja Lee, who’s been with the choir close to 20 years as a singer, 15 years as a board member and 12 as board president, is stepping down this year as board president, and Saragrace Wyckoff is taking her place.

“When asked to step into the role of board president in late 2007,” Sonja says, “I had dreams that this gem of a community chorus would thrive in its evolution with the years to come, and I am grateful to see this come to fruition.” Sonja adds, “This choir is ever growing and evolving. Kulshan Chorus is community. It is joy and hope. It is sadness and regret. It is the study of humanity, the highs and the lows, woven through music. It is thought-provoking, powerful, funny, tearful and beautiful and it is HUGE! We sing to create together something beyond self, to learn and to grow.”

In spring, the choir will undertake *Carmina Burana*, with three phenomenal choirs coming together with orchestra for a once in a lifetime experience, she adds.

To grow, to change, to evolve, and become better is the never-ending study of life, Sonja says.

“For me, there is always something more to learn, more stories to be told, lessons to be learned and this choir offers that. To be a part of a community that is dedicated to the same outcome... something beyond description, but unifying, compassionate and supportive. Speaking through song, what needs to be said, is impactful on many levels.”

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