

Lynn Sjolund takes a final bow

He steps down as the Rogue Valley Chorale's conductor with 'Forte at Forty'

Lynn Sjolund says he's going to leave them laughing when he goes. He'll retire from his post as Rogue Valley Chorale's artistic director and conductor this weekend as the choir concludes its 40th concert season.

"I'm not good at this sentimental stuff," he says. "We'll

By **LAURIE HEUSTON** open the
Mail Tribune shows
with 'It's

a Grand Night for Singing' by Rodgers and Hammerstein. None of that mushy stuff."

The concert, "Forte at Forty," will revisit highlights from RVC's 40 years of performances around the Rogue Valley — and the globe for that matter. With Sjolund at the helm, the choir has performed at Carnegie Hall in New York City and Salzburg Cathedral in Austria, among other places. It's also commissioned such works as composer David Childs' "To Musik," which it premiered in 2011.

"Forte at Forty" will be presented at 7:30 p.m. Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday, April 27-28, at the Craterian Theater, 23 S. Central Ave., Medford. Tickets cost \$10 or \$20; \$5 for students. Tickets may be purchased at the Craterian box office, 16 S. Bartlett St., online at www.craterian.org or by calling 541-779-3000.

Following its opener, the Chorale will get into works by Mozart and Brahms.

"We'll perform Mozart's motets 'Regina Coeli' — with

On the cover:

Rogue Valley Chorale singers Eric Smith, Kathy Gardan and Mary Kay Harmon pose with conductor Lynn Sjolund.

Photo by Jamie Lusch



Left to right: Mary Kay Harmon, conductor Lynn Sjolund and Eric Smith of the Rogue Valley Chorale.

solos by soprano Regina McDonald, alto Sylvia Pyeatt, tenor Ralph Dade and bass Paul Hegedorn — and 'Santa Maria,' a piece that the Founding Mothers of the Chorale want to do. It was performed at our first concert in 1973."

The singers whom the Chorale has come to affectionately know as the Founding Mothers approached Sjolund in 1973 about forming a choral group in the Rogue Valley.

"I was teaching high school at the time," he says. "They — Cathy Gordon, Mary Kay Harmon, Karen Foster, Nancy Purdy and Judy Cushing — wanted to continue to sing after participating in high school and college choirs."

Sjolund agreed to help them start a group if they would take care of the fundraising, marketing and other artistic support.

"It didn't quite work out that way," he says with a laugh. "As you know, I'm talking to you myself right now. No, actually they became wonderful contributors."

About 38 singers were in the group that first performed in '73, Sjolund says.

"This weekend's concerts will feature 103. It's a bigger group than usual. Some of the singers came back to see if I can still get on and off the podium."

From Mozart, the choir will move to a more substantial motet by Brahms titled "Why Then Has the Light Been Given."

"It's a sacred piece that starts with big, questioning chords. Each section reveals more as it nears its end," Sjolund says.

Other pieces chosen for the concert hold themes that relate to closure, he says. Miklos Rozsa's "To Everything There is a Season" is representative of the choir's talents, with its extensive text from Ecclesiastes. "In Conclusion" is the final song in Brahms' "Lovesong" waltzes.

Childs' "To Musik," commissioned by the Chorale two years ago, features text by English poet Robert Herrick and an obligato for cello, to be played by Michal Palzewicz.

"This is pretty heavy stuff," Sjolund says. "So we'll do

If you go

Who: Rogue Valley Chorale

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some fun things from musicals 'The Most Happy Fella,' 'Funny Girl' and 'Carousel.'

"We're going to close with Aaron Copland's 'Promise of Living' from the opera 'The Tender Land' and 'How Can I Keep From Singing,' an arrangement by James Mulholland. These are inspiring tunes. A bit schmaltzy, but inspiring."

Sjolund hasn't directed the chorale during its entire 40 years.

"Lois (his wife) and I moved to New Orleans for three years after I retired from teaching, and I took a job at Loyola University. I knew we'd never stay there after living in the Rogue Valley. It was like living in another country."

He played violin with the Rogue Valley Symphony for about five years, served a year as interim director for the Craterian Ginger Rogers Theater and, for the last 15 years, he's worked as a volunteer evaluating grants for the Portland-based Oregon Community Foundation, a nonprofit that funds art, music and theater organizations.

Laurie Anne Hunter succeeds Sjolund, and he says he's enthusiastic about the job she will do.

"No, I won't leave them crying when I go," Sjolund says. "It will be hard enough to leave. Sunday's show will be a real 'love-in,' so it might get messy. Saturday's performance may be closer to normal."

Online: Learn more about the Rogue Valley Chorale at www.mailtribune.com/tempo