

Carnegie Hall calls for local chorale

Longtime leader
Lynn Sjolund
eager to visit
New York venue

By Kathleen Alaks
of the Daily Courier

Music legend has it that the way to get to Carnegie Hall is to practice, practice, practice.

Well, after going through its paces for nearly 30 years, the Rogue Valley Chorale is finally on its way to New York's most prestigious music venue.

Led by conductor Lynn Sjolund, the chorale was invited to be part of a festival that will include about 200 other singers. The festival started Sunday and the Rogue Valley Chorale takes its place on the legendary stage March 26.

Sjolund (pronounced Sholund), says the honor is nothing short of magic.

"There's a magic about Carnegie Hall," he says. "Acoustically, it's outstanding and that's probably the reason it became famous. There are other concert halls, but nothing has a name like Carnegie Hall. And it has such a history of great singers and musicians."

Sjolund visited the historic hall last summer to meet with festival organizers.

The lobby walls are lined with hundreds of 8-by-10 photographs of artists, musicians and composers who have performed there.

"You see photos of Itzak Perlman, Leonard Bernstein, Yo Yo Ma, and you start thinking, 'We're going to play there, too.'"

Sjolund has been the chorale's conductor since it was founded in 1973, except for the three years that he was director of chorale studies at Loyola University in New Orleans. He agreed to take the position only if he was allowed to choose the choral music and arrange the programs, he says.

Sjolund likes to organize programs with a unifying idea or theme in mind, such as performing works of contemporary composers or exploring how various composers interpret similar texts, such as the Ave Maria or the Magnificat.

"I'm always looking for music. I listen and then file it away," he says.

He's hard-pressed to pick a favorite composer, however.

"If I had to choose, you can't

beat Bach," he concedes. "But there are so many outstanding composers. Ralph Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten have written some great things. But it's hard to pin down a favorite. There's so much great music out there."

Music has been part of Sjolund's life since his youth in Washington studying the violin and his schooling at the University of Oregon and at the Geneva Center for Music Education at Stuttgart, Germany, where in 1969 he met Doris.

They married in 1971. Doris Sjolund is the founder and conductor of the Rogue Valley Children's Chorus.

He taught for nearly 30 years in Medford public schools and after his retirement, taught at Lewis and Clark College, the University of Oregon and Southern Oregon University on an interim basis.

He served as president of the Northwest Division of the Music Educators National Conference and served on the American Choral Directors Association board of directors for Oregon.

He also was artistic director for Rogue Opera, conducting performances of "Die Fledermaus," "La Traviata," "Barber of Seville," "Don Pasquale," "Tosca" and "Pirates of Penzance." And he has conducted

the Britt Festival Orchestra and the Rogue Valley Symphony in concerts when the chorale was the featured group.

The chorale performs three regular programs each year, with concerts in fall, winter and spring.

"The biggest program we did was Bach's beautiful Mass last fall," Sjolund says. "It's probably the greatest piece of choral music ever written. The Bach piece was the most difficult and the most expensive we've ever done, but no one thought it wasn't worth it."

The chorale has also performed internationally, with three European trips under its

belt: Austria, the Czech Republic and Hungary; Sweden and Norway; and most recently to Italy in 1998, where they performed in Medford's sister city of Alba.

Though only 55 chorale members are New York-bound, the full ensemble is 90 voices strong. And nearly 20 of those are from the original founding group.

"I'm impressed with the longevity" of the chorale, Sjolund says, "and the fact that the talent keeps getting better. It's a tremendous wealth in the valley and speaks of the artistic flavor of the whole area. And it shows the lasting value of really great choral music."



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Lynn Sjolund has been the conductor of the Rogue Valley Chorale since it was founded in 1973.