



*Rogue
Valley
Chorale*

Fifteen Years of Song In the Rogue Valley

by Kathleen Davis

Affectionate greetings as well as chatter and a double-check for new music on the black piano at North Medford High School always accompany the opening of rehearsals of the Rogue Valley Chorale. The obvious camaraderie exists at least in part because this singing group has been performing for fifteen years with some members of the original group, including several married couples, still singing.

The Rogue Valley Chorale was founded in 1973 to fill a need for serious choral music in the Rogue Valley. From the first season with 45 singers, the group has grown in numbers and level of performance. Thirteen years ago a young singer from Lynn Sjolund's High School

Medford Choir gathered his courage to audition and subsequently perform with the Rogue Valley Chorale. That tall personable young man is now 31 years old with a wife and daughter and is the guest conductor for the Chorale, filling Sjolund's position while the former director is on leave of absence to direct the choral music program at Loyola University in New Orleans.

To celebrate the fifteenth season, Mr. Warren has chosen a feast of opera, Gilbert & Sullivan, Jerome Kern, Mozart, Stephen Sondheim, and Gershwin stage choral music to mark the occasion. The concert will take place Saturday, April 29th and Sunday, April 30th at the Craterian Theatre.

Warren graciously found time for an interview before a recent rehearsal



of the Chorale, and I found him busily setting the room to rights after a day with his quickly growing choral music program at North High School where he also succeeded Sjolund as the director of that program. In spite of his fatigue after a day with high school youngsters, his energy and enthusiasm for the Chorale waxed as our conversation progressed. Warren's engaging and youthful demeanor accompany an insight and maturity revealed when he discusses his preparation for this new role and his approach to choral music. Warren, who graduated from Medford High School in 1975, is one of many young musicians whom Lynn Sjolund has inspired to pursue a musical career. After earning his Bachelor's and Master's degrees at Lewis and Clarke College, Warren gained experience in the Klamath Union High School before coming home to step into the North Medford teaching position. The task of filling the shoes of a teacher who had become nearly legendary hasn't intimidated Warren, and the North Medford High School Choir has grown and flourished since Medford divided into two senior high schools. Warren also seems to be able to move with little difficulty from a challenging high school level of music instruction to a more sophisticated level appropriate to the Chorale.

As he described the concert music for this spring's concert, his face glowed with intensity and enthusiasm. "We chose stage music of Mozart, Kern, Wagner, Sondheim, and others because it's accessible to any audience, it's appealing, and it's musically satisfying," declared Warren. The chorale has performed a huge variety of music in the past, including some very serious works, and the intent of the spring concert is to offer the

excitement of program music. "It's appeal," Warren went on to say, "is in its intensity and drama. A stage song like 'Memories' from *Cats* (all the *Cats* choruses will be included in the spring concert) has a specific dramatic urgency that most of the audience recognizes, yet it is also aesthetically appealing in a purely musical sense."

Rehearsals and concert preparation, added Warren, are "especially exciting with the Rogue Valley Chorale because the singers, many of whom have had serious voice training, have at their command varieties of styles and diction so that the music is quickly read, leaving time for levels of interpretation that are sophisticated and subtle. The group, though amateur, is very responsive to my physical and verbal musical suggestions and I try to be a lens through which the singers can focus on what the sound should be. I try to prepare the singers to perform on the edge of disaster, so that they can do and reach for a performance level unimagined before the excitement of the performance."

"Really," confided Warren, "the rehearsal times are the most delightful. When we re-create the music anew each time, explore its nuances, work to become a group, the joy of making music supersedes the goal of concert preparation. Music (and perhaps drama) is the only art that exists in time. The instant of sound is precious and never will occur again." Reason indeed for Rogue Valley residents to look forward to the Chorale's concert: a spring celebration of fifteen years of song.

Kathleen David is the Arts Training Director for the Britt Festivals and writes often for the Guide.

