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## Rejoice in Christmas music this weekend

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What's the latest craze to hit the music world? No, it's not some variation of rap-metal or pop-country.

Try choral music.

Yes, apparently many composers today are taking a stab at writing music for a capella and classical vocal ensembles, which means when a group like the Lanier Chamber Singers gets together, they have even more pieces to choose from - some of which will be brand new to audiences.

When the Lanier Chamber Singers begin their repertoire Friday and Sunday at Grace Episcopal Church in Gainesville, their selections not only include Christmas standards such as "A Child is Born in Bethlehem" or "Ave Maria," but they will also be singing new songs like "O Nata Lux," a piece composed this year by Guy Forbes.

"Choirs have just really started to have a resurgence of a renaissance, and there's just some wonderful composers out there right now," said Michelle Roueché, music director for the Lanier Chamber Singers who is also the director of choral activities at Brenau University.

Roueché said she attended a choir music convention in Texas this past summer. While she was there, she was introduced to new composers and their pieces, she said, and several of the selections in this weekend's performances, including "O Nata Lux," "Ukranian Alleluia" and the title song, "All My Heart This Night Rejoices," were pieces Roueché discovered at the convention.

"In Texas, choral music is as big as football, so I went back to the convention to educate myself," she said. "It is a wonderful time for choral music right now."

The Lanier Chamber Singers comprises many area school and church choral directors as its members, along with singers who studied music in college or have enjoyed singing and playing music their whole life. While most of the members are from around Gainesville, some travel up from Atlanta to take part in the group.

Member and public relations chairwoman for the group, Cindy Dieckman, said the chorus is very fortunate to have so many professionals among its members.

"It's just a jewel in this town that people don't know about."

This weekend's concerts will have a Christmas theme, Roueché said, which is a tradition for the group's November concert.

"We try to have something for everybody; highs and lows," she said. "It should be like a good movie, where it's well paced and keeps you wanting more. And we have the singalong with the audience, that they can participate, too, because usually when you come to a choral concert you want to sing, too."

This will be the first concert Henry and Kathy Roberts will be a part of, and the Gainesville residents agreed they are looking forward to singing "All My Heart This Night Rejoices."

"Because it's gorgeous," Kathy said. "It's absolutely breathtaking. I may have heard it before, but never performed it before. It's just beautiful."

And for returning members like Dieckman, the concert is also a chance to reunite with friends, who all come together for the biannual concerts. After they practice about a dozen times and do the performances, many members don't see each other for about six months, until the next concert rolls around.

"We have fun. We have fun doing it," she said. "We're there for a purpose; we want it to be good. But we have a camaraderie with each other. After the March one we'll be gone for six months, and then we rejoin."

Also, concertgoers who arrive early can take a look at artworks on display in Grace Episcopal's Parish Hall as part of the Festival of the Arts. The pieces, created by church members, are available for sale.

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