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Symphony, singers team up for Christmas concert

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Composer George Frideric Handel died 250 years ago, but his compositions are alive in symphonies across the country as they celebrate Handel's life by performing one of his great works, "Messiah," this Christmas season.

One such symphony is the Gainesville Symphony Orchestra, which will be performing "Messiah" with The Lanier Chamber Singers on Tuesday at Brenau University's Pearce Auditorium.

Gregory Pritchard, director of the Gainesville Symphony Orchestra, said including The Lanier Chamber Singers in the performance is in keeping with this year's theme for the symphony, "Music that Sings."

"We are featuring various vocal groups and vocalists throughout the season, and I wanted to make sure that (The Lanier Chamber Singers) were included," Pritchard said.

Michelle Roueche, director of The Lanier Chamber Singers, said this is the first year the singers have joined the GSO for "Messiah."

"This is the 250th anniversary of Handel's death, and so we decided this was a wonderful year to do this collaboration," Roueche said, adding that "Messiah" has been popular for so many years because of its sacred content.

"For Christian believers, the story is timeless as well. So many people love the music only for the music, but there are also people who love it for its spiritual message," Roueche said.

The composition is an oratorio, she said, a sacred musical work "written to replace opera during Lent."

"Operas weren't allowed during Lent, so the composers came up with oratorios so that they would still be able to earn a living during the Lenten season."

Roueche said Handel wrote "Messiah" with a Christmas and an Easter portion, but Tuesday's performance will include only the Christmas portion and the "Hallelujah Chorus."

She said the audience will be invited to sing along with several choruses, but soloists Michelle Martin, Celeste Jefcoats, Timothy Gale and David Thomas also will accompany the GSO for portions of the performance.

"This is a sing-along performance, so we're asking people to come prepared to sing," said Pritchard. "They can bring their 'Messiah' scores, and we will have a limited number of scores available if somebody needs one."

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