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Chorale concert is a celebration of women

BY Mandy Marksteiner

When Fred Graham, musical director of the Sangre de Cristo Chorale, was planning the 42nd season, he came across a survey by the Women in Music Project examined 1445 classical concerts in across the globe and only 76 concerts included female composers.

That statistic was eye-opening, and the

more he researched it the more he wanted to do something.

That's why the Sangre de Cristos Chorale's December concert, A Celebration of Women, will only feature women composers. "It's an opportunity to expand our repertoire and find wonderful new voices."

The concert will be in Los Alamos on Friday, December 6 at The United Church of Los Alamos at 7 pm

and in Santa Fe at St. John's United Methodist Church on Saturday, December 7 at 4 pm. Deborah Wagner is the accompanist.

This holiday concert will feature traditional carols, with a unique spin from composers; Carol Barnett, Wil-liametta Spencer, Nancy Grundahl, Gwyneth Walker, Nancy Wertsch, Sarah Quartel, Katie Kring, and Anne-Marie Hildebrandt as well as

12th-century nun Hildegard von Bingen.

Graham said, "When I started to do research for this concert, I found composers that I hadn't heard before, like Katie Kring, who wrote 'Jesus, Jesus, Rest Your Head', which is so fresh and beautiful."

Some of the composers on the concert were self-published, so they bought the music directly through the websites.

They will perform Gwyneth Walker's setting of "The Cherry Tree Carol", where she added her own used her compositional skill and humor to a medieval English folk carol in which Mary tells Joseph that she's pregnant. Graham said, "In the Gwyneth Walker version Mary has all the power and repeatedly uses the word 'cherry' to needle him."

This concert fea-

tures the World Premier of "Holly Songs", a three-movement commissioned piece by Traci Mendell

Sangre de Cristo Chorale commissioned a three-movement work by Traci Mendell.

Mendell is a graduate of Centenary College of Louisiana and The Florida State University. Dr. Mendel has taught at the University of New

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Orleans, Middle Tennessee State University, BirminghamSouthern College, and Appalachian State University. She is now in her ninth year as a Lecturer in Music at Troy University.

"Holly Songs" has three movements, "The Christmas Holly" 2. "Hail, Noble Face of Noble Friend!" 3. "But Give Me Holly, Bold and Jolly."

When they were first

planning the commissioned piece, Mendell and Graham discovered that they both enjoyed the work of the poet Christina Rossetti. The text of two movements are Rossetti poems, and the third is a poem by Eliza Cook, who also wrote the inscription on the Statue of Liberty.

When asked how it feels to be included in a concert celebrating women, Mendell said, "It feels wonderful. It really does."

Mendell said that when she was in graduate school, one of her professors advised her

to not pursue performance opportunities specifically open to women, because she might pigeon hole herself and lose out on opportunities. She said, "I don't think that was the best advice. I don't think the world is like that."

Despite her professor's advice, she has found that concerts celebrating women generate excitement and support.

For example, March is Women's History Month, and last year she suggested that they do a concert to celebrate it.

One of her colleagues took the idea further, and planned a concert with only female performers and composers and he insisted that Mendell write something for it.

"It caught me off guard how much the male colleagues supported it and how enthusiastic the students were," she said. "It is unique, but it also bothers me that it's unique. It shouldn't be an issue. It's just music and people should have opportunities."

Mendell knows what it's like to be around people who doubt her abilities because she is a woman, but she never let that stop her.

"I took my first composition class on a dare from my boyfriend. He said, 'Everyone knows women can't write, but at least it will be entertaining.'"

The relationship with the boyfriend ended abruptly, and she began a lifelong love affair with writing music. She said, "I was happy. I couldn't care less what

he said. I could finally breathe musically, and once I started I didn't stop. You need to ignore the voices that say you can't or you shouldn't and go forward and be who you're supposed to be. There is so much we can accomplish musically or artistically if we skip the self-doubt."

Tickets cost \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door. 18 and under are free. Advance tickets may be ordered online at www.sdcchorale.org.