

Mr. Ketterling's opus

Ensemble honors
longtime choir
director

By Matthew Stolle

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Lloyd Ketterling spent nearly four decades spreading his love and passion for music to others as choir director for Rochester public schools.

So two weeks before Christmas, the Choral Arts Ensemble of Rochester will offer a token of a community's appreciation, a musical gift of sorts. The 46-member choir will open its Christmas program with a song specially composed to celebrate Ketterling and his musical contributions.

It will be the first of 10 carols commissioned over the next 10 years in honor of the man who "was always about supporting the students."

Ketterling, 84, taught choir in Rochester public schools from 1959 to 1987, at Kellogg Middle School, Rochester Central High School and John Marshall High School. In many ways, it was a heyday of musical performance in the schools before budget cuts began to take their toll.

Choirs back then could be as large as 100 students or more. And Ketterling, a lover of musicals, was a regular fixture in the orchestra pit for staged performances of "My Fair Lady," "Carnival" and "Oliver!"

"It was such a huge part of so many people's experience in school," said Rhett Ketterling, Lloyd's son, who performed in some of those of musicals and is now a Mayo Clinic doctor.

The song that will kick off the Ketterling Christmas Carol project draws its inspiration from his past. The song, called "Make We Joye Now in this Fest," was composed by Rene Clausen, the conductor of the Concordia College choir, the same choir Ketterling sang in as a student.

The commissioned work also continues a tradition begun a decade ago by the ensemble.



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Lloyd Ketterling, a former choir director for Rochester public schools, is being honored with commissioned Christmas songs — one for each of the next 10 years.

Caroling projects continue

Last season the ensemble completed a 10-year program in memory of Mary Joyce Frantz, a Rochester woman who died in 2000. Composers were commissioned from all over the country to write songs in her honor and the resulting music "was one of the best things that we were doing with the Choral Arts Ensemble," said Michael Culloton, the ensemble's artistic director.

Given the results, Culloton said it was his hope to see the Christmas caroling project continue in some way. That's where Rhett Ketterling stepped in.

Rhett said he had long wanted

to honor his dad. Walking the hallways of Mayo Clinic, first as a medical student and later as pathologist, Rhett would continually run into people who fondly recalled their choir days under Ketterling.

"Everywhere I went, it was the same thing. 'Do you know, Mr. Ketterling?' He was my favorite teacher," Rhett said.

Rhett and those involved in the planning kept the project a secret from Lloyd until they were ready to break the news. Then at an annual Valentine's Day benefit, Lloyd and Rhett were called to the front of the room for the announcement.

If you go

What: The Lloyd Ketterling Christmas Carol Alumni Project.

When: The first carol will be sung by the Choral Arts Ensemble of Rochester at its annual Choral Arts Ensemble Christmas at Assisi. Performances will be at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 9-10 and 4:30 p.m. Dec. 11 at Lourdes Chapel, Assisi Heights, 1001 14th St. N.W., Rochester.

Ketterling said he was "amazed" and "overwhelmed" when he heard about the project.

"I was wondering if I was hearing things," Ketterling said. "I'm 84, and they said they're doing this for 10 years, so I have to live to 94."

Ability to sing

Ketterling said his own teaching style was to encourage and cajole people, no matter their musical skills, that they had the ability to sing.

"If a student wanted to and was able to — and I could get my hands on them — they were singing. And the word got around. Kids were having fun with it," Ketterling said.

A new website gives a sense of Ketterling's ability to get the most from his students. Created by Ketterling's granddaughter, Morgan Hollister, the website is a compendium of photographs of past John Marshall choirs and musicals, as well as recordings of choirs from 1974 through 1978.

The site, at www.lloydketterlingchristmascarol.org, also provides visitors an opportunity to donate to the Ketterling Christmas Carol Alumni project. Organizers hope to raise \$25,000 to commission composers to create 10 carols.

At the song's premiere on Dec. 9, the audience will be able to partake in a unique musical experience, Culloton said.

"Nobody has heard this piece before, and it's for one of our own Rochester star teachers," he said.