

North Island Choral Presents “A Fantasy of English Carols”

The North Island Choral Society begins rehearsals for their winter concert “A Fantasy of English Carols” on Tuesday, September 4. This community choir provides a unique musical opportunity for singers of all ages in the Comox Valley to join for the love of classical music with no auditions to cause anxiety! Its repertoire covers a broad range of classical choral music, generally involving 80 singers, a supporting orchestra of 20-25 musicians and up to 5 soloists, ably directed for the past 24 years by Paul Colthorpe and accompanied by Elvera Penner. Membership is \$70 for adults, \$30 for students and the first rehearsal is free. We generally meet at Mark Isfeld Secondary from 7:00-9:00 pm but the first rehearsal in September will be at Comox United Church, 250 Beach Avenue, Comox, starting at 6:30 pm for registration.

The repertoire for our upcoming winter performances can be termed “A Fantasy of English Carols” or a collection of seasonal songs in free form. The works chosen by Colthorpe for this concert are truly a collection of fantasia by four well-known English composers of the 20th century: Benjamin Britten, Gustav Holst, John Rutter, and Ralph Vaughan Williams.

The Magnificat by John Rutter is a composition of seven movements based on the verses from the Gospel of St. Luke wherein the Virgin Mary learns that she is to give birth to Christ. In the words of Rutter, “it is a poetic outpouring of praise, joy and trust in God” which weaves a magical spell of peace. He combines Latin text with an English poem; Gregorian chants with Latin American elements to reflect the feast days of the Virgin which are celebrated with singing, dancing and processions. Soprano Carole Anne Parkinson is the soloist.

A Ceremony of Carols is a choral piece by Benjamin Britten which consists of eleven movements with text in Latin and in Middle English based on poems from the 15th and 16th centuries. Many of the movements are written as rounds or call-and-response pieces; the Gregorian chant in unison marks the beginning and end. The parts range from upbeat and festive to reverent; quiet and soothing to dark and foreboding. Soprano soloist Sophie Simard will join Parkinson for this work.

Ralph Vaughan Williams' Fantasia on Christmas Carols is a choral tapestry of folk songs from southern England: *The Truth Sent from Above*, *Come All You Worthy Gentlemen*, *On Christmas Night*, and *There is a Fountain*. It also features fragments of other well-known carols such as *The First Nowell*. Baritone Christopher Bellamy sings with the choir in this piece,

Some five years before writing *The Planets*, Gustav Holst wrote *Christmas Day*, a choral fantasia of old carols. He makes use of familiar tunes such as *God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen* and *The First Nowell* in combination with the *Old Breton Melody* and *Good Christian Men Rejoice* to weave a festive piece of solo and choral parts with the central theme of rejoicing.

The concerts will take place on Friday, November 30 at 7.30 pm. and on Saturday, December 1 at 2.00 pm. Both concerts are at St. George's United Church, 505 6th St, Courtenay, B. C.