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Aspen Daily News

Aspen Choral Society announces spring program, "Illuminare"

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Staff Writer

Aspen Choral Society announced in a release on Tuesday the details of its 2023 spring production.

The program will run March 17-19, with nightly performances to be held at different venues in the Roaring Fork Valley — including at Glenwood Springs High School on Friday, March 17; Carbondale's Thunder River Theatre Company on Saturday, March 18; and The Arts Campus At Willits in Basalt on Sunday, March 19.

All performances are scheduled for 7 p.m., and doors open at 6:30 p.m.

This year's program is titled "Illuminare." The title is meant to convey an emergence from darkness into light, according to the ACS release.

The choral and orchestral music production honors the universal human conditions of despair and hope, the release states, and will be an immersive experience from the moment the audience enters each venue.

Rather than traditional choral staging, "Illuminare" will include movement and lighting designed by valley-based musician and



The Aspen Choral Society is pictured performing last year at Carbondale's Thunder River Theatre. Later this month, ACS will bring its spring program, "Illuminare," to the Carbondale theater, as well as Glenwood Springs High School and The Arts Campus At Willits. "Illuminare" will take place March 17-19; the program combines music, movement and lighting for an immersive experience. Courtesy of Aspen Choral Society

actor, Michael Schöpe.

"In order to better immerse the audience in this experience, the musicians will use stage position, body movement and lighting to amplify the meaning of the lyrics and music," Schöpe said in the ACS release. "We are excited to add this element to our performance, stretching our own creativity and daring to meet the audience halfway."

"Illuminare" is centered on three choral pieces, all of which were composed by Norwegian

composer, Ola Gjeilo.

Gjeilo is an accomplished pianist and one of the most frequently performed composers in the choral world, according to ACS' release. He currently resides in the United States and is a composer-in-residence with Distinguished Concerts International New York — the organization which invited and hosted ACS's participation in the grand "Messiah" performance at Carnegie Hall in 2018, as noted in the release.

Of Gjeilo's pieces included in the ACS program, two of them — titled "Dark Night of the Soul" and "Luminous Night of the Soul" — incorporate lyrics from the poem "Dark Night of the Soul" by the Spanish poet, St. John of the Cross.

The third Gjeilo piece featured in "Illuminare" is titled "Across the Vast, Eternal Sky" and introduces the concept of a phoenix rising from the flames, as stated in the ACS release.

ACS Music Director Paul Dankers commented on the program's messaging as it relates to a community approach to healing and strength.

"As human beings, we all go through individual and collective difficult and dark times," Dankers said in the release. "We each do what we can to rest and find our own path through these times, and sometimes simply being a part of a community that is struggling together is a way to find healing."

The music director continued: "We aimed to create a program that lets us seek and be curious about how we emerge from darkness — music can be part of individual and community healing and strength when we experience it together."

Dankers collaborated extensively with Concertmaster MinTze Wu to design this year's spring program. Wu, who is an accomplished violinist and a leader in the valley's arts and

music scene, reached deeply into her own creativity for the ACS production, the release states.

She added several instrumental pieces by Barber ("Adagio"), Tavener ("Song of the Angel"), Ravel ("Kaddish" from *Deux Mélodies Hébraïques*) and Ljova ("Healing") — all of which introduce different traditions of prayer, healing and mysticism to the program.

About the unusual program, Wu wrote in the release: "What earthy sweetness remains unmixed with grief? What glory stands immutable on earth? We invite the audience to bring your sorrows, your pain, your conflicts and struggles, and together release them into the light of compassion and deep knowing."

"Illuminare" will take place March 17-19. Tickets are \$20 in advance for adults, \$8 for youth (ages 13-17) and \$1 for children (12 and under). It is encouraged to buy tickets online in advance, as ticket rates are set slightly higher for at-the-door purchases on the day of a show.

For more information or to purchase tickets, visit aspenchoralsociety.org.