

NPAS community choir will lift voices in two Christmas concerts

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As the Northlake Performing Arts Society gets ready for its 2024 Christmas concerts, the NPAS community choir has a lot to sing about.

The COVID pandemic that shuttered most buildings, traditions and community activities in 2020 almost wiped out this long-standing, nonprofit group of NPAS singers.

Membership plummeted to 14 determined souls who hung on, enduring Zoom online rehearsals (and varying internet speeds). But it was enough — along with the talent of music director Kenya Lawrence Jackson and determined NPAS leadership — to keep this skeletal singing group alive and able to slowly rebuild.

Fast forward to August 2024 when the choir staged a Motown concert in two shows — one evening, one matinee — and drew a combined audience of 360.

Membership is also back up to some 60 singers, a mix of amateurs and professionals, mostly from St. Tammany Parish.

“We’ve come a long way from the lean COVID years,” said Sandy Hughes, NPAS’s immediate past president who led the group for the last decade — including through the rocky pandemic era. “Now we want to be in the thriving years where we are financially stable and can share our joy of music with all on the northshore.”

NPAS will perform their “Voices of Christmas” holiday shows on Dec. 20 and 22, one evening and one matinee, in the Covington High School Auditorium. Children will make a special appearance in each performance to sing a lively, kid-friendly Christmas tune.

Next year, NPAS will be 30 years old, having been organized in 1995 as an auditioned community choir focused on fine choral arts performances meant to enhance cultural life and be a uniting force for the arts.

After surviving and recovering membership and attendance numbers lost to COVID, Hughes said NPAS is now situating itself for future growth and a stronger financial footing.

Historically, NPAS is supported only by annual dues from its own members, concert ticket sales and fluctuating donations from individuals and businesses. They get no government funding, and Hughes said it was the rainy day reserve NPAS maintained that enabled it to pay their music director, accompanist and insurance premiums during COVID.

Additionally, NPAS still exists without a home and must negotiate annually for the use of affordable stages able to accommodate their needs.

“That’s actually our biggest challenge for every performance,” Hughes said. “Fortunately, when there are stages that will work for us, folks have been gracious enough to work with us if they could.”

NPAS’s newly adopted strategic plan identifies some general growth and financial priorities and plans for accomplishing each.

- Grow and support a 75-member choir by 2028 that can pull a solid 400 attendees to each concert, and take multiple steps to those goals, including aggressive recruitment; improved social media and public outreach; an upgraded sound system, if financially possible; and regularly assessing the kinds of music audiences want to hear.

- To support the larger choir, NPAS will work to rebuild its reserve fund; find grants; and aggressively seek sponsors — including corporate sources — willing to partner with the community choir.

Tickets for the Christmas shows are available online at NPASsingers.org or npas.ticketleap.com or can be bought in person at Downtown Drugs in Covington or C & C Pharmacy in Mandeville. Tickets are \$15 for those 13 years and older; free for younger ones.



FILE PHOTO BY GRANT THERKILDSEN
Music Director Kenya Lawrence Jackson leads the Northlake Performing Arts Society singers in concert.