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The Savannah Philharmonic will present three holiday pops concerts in the Johnny Mercer Theater the weekend of December 7.

a Holiday Tradition

With the Savannah Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus

By Kristyn Fielding

Tis the season to be grateful for all that is bestowed upon us, and celebrate the blessings of the holidays. One of the highlights, this time of year, is the much-anticipated Savannah Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus's beloved annual Holiday Pops concerts. These high-energy, fun-filled performances will feature holiday favorites for everyone, including traditional tunes, sing-along melodies and holiday classics.

This year, music lovers will have three chances to enjoy this program at the Johnny Mercer Theater. Two full shows are slated for 7:30 p.m. Friday, December 7, and Saturday, December 8. The evening concerts are a wonderful way to cap off a day of holiday merriment in beautiful downtown Savannah. Patrons can spend an afternoon browsing in

quaint shops on festively decorated Broughton Street, enjoy a delicious dinner at one of the Historic District's many fine restaurants, then head to the Johnny Mercer Theatre for a joyous evening of holiday tunes, courtesy of Savannah's own Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus.

There will also be a family matinee on Saturday, December 8, at 3 p.m. The Savannah Children's Choir will make a guest appearance, and Santa Claus usually makes time during his busy schedule to stop by and meet the families. This one-hour show is perfect for families with young children and those who appreciate the convenience of an earlier show. Erica Gabriel, American Traditions Vocal Competition's 2018 Gold Medalist, will perform as a guest soloist with the chorus

during all three shows.

Dr. Matt Caine joined the philharmonic earlier this year as chorus master, and is delighted to be part of this Savannah tradition during its harmonious 10th season. "I am having a wonderful time in my first season with the Savannah Philharmonic Chorus," he says. "Building upon the great work accomplished by the chorus under the direction of Monica Harper Dekle, we are raising the bar of artistic achievement, and I think the growth will be apparent to seasoned audience members. This will be my first time performing at the Johnny Mercer Theater, and I am looking forward to conducting the orchestra and chorus in this wonderful venue."



The Savannah Philharmonic and chorus will perform several holiday favorites, including a few involving the audience.

Caine brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to his role in leading the all-volunteer chorus. He is the director of music ministries at Wesley United Methodist Church at Frederica, where he oversees a large music program and conducts multiple choirs and instrumental groups. Prior to his arrival at St. Simons Island, Caine was the director of music at First Presbyterian Church in St. Petersburg, Florida, and artistic director for the professional chamber chorus, Concordia Vo-

cal Ensemble. In addition to serving as a conductor for church, community, professional and symphonic choruses, Caine has served as interim director of choral activities for St. Petersburg College and Allen University. He has taught at Claffin University, the University of South Carolina, and the University of South Florida. He has a doctor of musi-

cal arts in conducting from the University of South Carolina; a master of music in choral conducting and vocal performance from the University of South Florida; a master of music education from Samford University; and a bachelor of music from Birmingham Southern College.

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Caine's principal area of research is Bulgarian choral music. He has created performance editions and has conducted the U.S. premiere of more than 30 pieces of Bulgarian choral music. In 2009, Caine was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship by the State Department to conduct research in Bulgaria. In the same year, the Department of Education awarded him a Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship to attend the Russian and East European summer Intensive language institute at the University of Pittsburgh and New Bulgarian University in Sofia.



Matt Caine

Caine enjoys the time he spends in Savannah. In addition to rehearsing, performing and undertaking other chorus and orchestra-related business, he likes the city's wealth of recreational, cultural and culinary offerings. He comments, "A few of my favorite things about Savannah are the beautiful parks and scenery, the charming people, and River Street Sweets!"

Focusing on the series of December concerts, Caine says, "The holidays are such a special time for families, and we are preparing some favorite selections with one or two surprises. We will have several beloved and familiar holiday pieces, including a few involving the audience; a new composition whose text was written by one of our choristers – Melissa Emery (who lives on Skidaway Island) – and two pieces that will most likely be unfamiliar but are certain to become new favorites!"

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Holiday Pops concerts are a great idea for company or group celebrations, and for employers to demonstrate to their employees how much their contributions are appreciated. Corporate ticket packages of 10 receive a discount of 25 percent and are available at www.savannahboxoffice.com. Tickets can also be purchased by at www.savannahphilharmonic.org/event/holiday-pops. Tickets for the evening performances range from \$25 to \$80. Tickets for the Saturday matinee are \$15 each, with general seating.

For more information on the Savannah Philharmonic, please visit www.savannahphilharmonic.org, or call 912.232.6002 or email info@savannahphilharmonic.org.

The performances are a major focus for the orchestra and chorus, as the rehearsal schedule intensifies between Thanksgiving and opening night. "Holiday Pops will be meaningful to me for several reasons," explains Caine. "It will be the first of -hopefully- many holidays that I will celebrate with my new-found Savannah Philharmonic family, and I will get to conduct the orchestra and chorus on those two unfamiliar pieces I mentioned earlier."

Savannah's Philharmonic is very thankful for its many Skidaway Island donors, community partners and audience members who have ensured a successful and artistically rich decade. The mission of informing, educating

and enriching the community through orchestral and choral performances, and promoting and increasing community knowledge and appreciation of the arts, is especially important at this time of year.

Caine says, "I think some of the key themes of the holiday season - light, hope, goodwill, and above all, peace on earth - are universal notions that transcend religions and cultures. Seeing people return their focus to these things, if but for a brief time, renews my faith in humanity and my hope that light, hope, goodwill and peace may one day triumph over the division, malice and rancor that exists in our society."



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