

Kona Music Society History

In the fall of 1990, Ken Staton, former Chair of the Performing Arts Department at UH Hilo, announced in *West Hawaii Today* a meeting for those interested in learning and performing choral music. Nearly 50 people showed up for the first rehearsal at the Central Kona Union Church and the Kona Community Chorus was born. Ken's friend, Mike Nolls was instrumental in bringing the group together. It was an all-volunteer chorus for the first several years.

The chorus' first concert, Dec. 21, 1990 at Central Kona Union Church, featured performances of J.S. Bach's Christmas Cantata and excerpt's from Franz Schubert's Mass in G, followed by some traditional carols arranged by John Rutter. From this stellar beginning, the chorus has usually presented three or four performances each year for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. As Christmas trees are decorated each December, the chorus presents the amazing popular part I from George Frederick Handel's Messiah. Generally a second program is offered, usually featuring other Christmas and winter season music. One or more spring concerts - featuring classical, folk, popular and international music themes - have also been presented every year since 1991. Among the classical works presented have been Requiems by Mozart, Brahms, Fauré, Duruflé and Rutter and Masses by Mozart, Schubert, Haydn, Beethoven and Dvorák. The one-act Christmas opera "Amahl and the Night Visitors" and a program entitled "An Afternoon at the Opera" have also been presented. International folk music has ranged from A to Z - Appalachia to Zambia, including music of Hawai'i - from traditional chants to compositions by Michael Springer, Rodney Wong and Jerre Tanner.

Mr. Staton conducted the chorus until 2003, when the chorus' name changed to Kona Music Society and Mark Barville became Music Director and conductor. Susan McCreary Duprey (an experienced choral director from Oahu and daughter of the late John McCreary, a Honolulu organist who accompanied the chorus in concert several times) became Music Director in January 2010. An exciting future lies ahead for the chorus under her expert and dynamic direction. On July 1, 2014, in anticipation of the celebration of its 25th anniversary, Kona Music Society was renamed Kona Choral Society. Highlights of the 2014-15 year included a banquet attended by many long-time chorus members and supporters, most notably founding director Ken Staton, and the first performance ever in Kona of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" at our season-ending Spring concert.

The chorus was initially accompanied on the piano by Gloria Juan, music teacher at Kealakehe Intermediate School. Ms. Juan has accompanied the chorus for rehearsals throughout most of the intervening years and continues in that role today. Concert accompaniment has varied widely over the years, ranging from the initial piano-only through various guest organists to a wide variety of orchestras including from 6 to 30 instrumentalists. Orchestra musicians are recruited on a concert-to-concert basis from the Kona, Hawai'i Island and statewide pool of amateur and professional musicians. Soloists appropriate to the works performed are generally selected, where possible, from the chorus. Many wonderful and well-known guest soloists have also performed with us over the years, including Hawaii operatic luminaries Buzz Tennant, Quinn Kelsey and Amy Mills.

Weekly practices have been held on Wednesday evenings since the beginning. The chorus outgrew its initial venue at Central Kona Union Church and began practicing at the Konawaena High School band room in 1992, then in 1998 moved to the Kealakehe Intermediate School Band Room, where it continues to meet.

The chorus has presented many performances at the Aloha Theatre, the Sheraton Keauhou Bay Resort & Spa (formerly, the Kona Surf Resort), and King Kamehameha's Kona Beach Hotel; they

have also performed at Lutheran Church of Holy Trinity, Mokuaikaua Church, St. Michaels Catholic Church, First United Protestant Church of Hilo, UH Hilo Theatre, several South Kohala resorts, HPA's Davies Chapel and Kahilu Theatre in Waimea, Hawai'i County's pavilions at the Old Airport Park and Hale Halawai, and other venues around Hawai'i Island.

Under the leadership of singer volunteer Sue Welter, the chorus has organized and conducted concert tours, beginning with a spectacular expedition of more than 100 people from Kona to mainland China in 1997. We toured in and around Beijing, Shanghai and Soujou and presented concerts of Hawaiian, U.S. Folk, classical and Chinese songs in Beijing and Shanghai. Ms. Welter has organized subsequent performance tours to Scandinavia and Australia, as well as non-singing tours to England, Alaska and Scotland-Ireland. Our most recent tour, in 2012, was a performance tour to Europe where we sang in cathedrals in Prague, Melk (Austria) and Vienna. These tours have provided exciting international travel opportunities for chorus members and others in the Kona community. Slightly higher fees charged for non-singers help to supplement the chorus budget.

In 1994 the chorus formed a Children's Chorus. Their performances have been very popular, especially during the holiday season and for convention groups at West Hawai'i hotels. A Teen Chorus was later formed and directed by Bernaldo Evangelista, until his move to the mainland. Currently Marinella Savarese directs the KMS Youth Chorus, assisted and accompanied by Ms. Juan-Tapa'atoutai. Rehearsals take place on Thursday afternoons at Kealakehe Intermediate School band room. Youth from third grade through twelfth grade are invited to join the Youth Chorus.

Starting from an all-volunteer chorus which met its budget largely through car washes, the Kona Music Society currently raises funds to support its performances and professional staff through dues, grants, private donations and fundraising activities such as silent auctions, special musical events and international tours. Ticket sales at performances provide only approximately 30% of the cost of the concerts.